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## ABSTRACT

This journal issue focuses on instructional methods for teaching the English language arts to gifted and handicapped children. The articles discuss a variety of topics, including (1) remedial language instruction; (2) improving a dyslexic student's spelling; (3) creative writing for the language disabled; (4) writing instruction for emotionally or mentally retarded mainstreamed children; (5) young adult literature featuring handicapped characters; (6) teaching ideas for exceptional students, including literature study and word origins; (7) writing enrichment opportunities for gifted students; and (8) decreasing testing in favor of more reading and writing. (HTH)

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## Virginia English Bulletin

Volume 32, Number 1  
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Focus: Teaching Exceptional Students

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# Virginia English Bulletin

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THE VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH  
AND LANGUAGE ARTS

ALAN M. McLEOD, *Editor*

School of Education, Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, VA 23284

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Virginia Commonwealth University

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## **TWO STACKS LATER: Teaching Exceptional Students —Exceptional Teachers and an Exceptional Organization**

Alan M. McLeod

Former NCTE president Robert Squires, a high school teacher from Oneonta, NY, recently commented:

*I think that to have an excellent school program, a teacher must have a classroom climate that shows students that he or she values the knowledge they bring with them and values what they think—a climate that allows students to learn by making mistakes without fear of being penalized. One of my predecessors as president, Yetta Goodman, called it respecting the learner.*

*Also, in excellent programs, students have a very clear idea of what they're supposed to learn and why. They are working toward a goal that has been stated in terms of what's valuable to them. In a weak program, students haven't the foggiest idea why the activities they're being put through are going on. This is particularly true of weak students; they simply don't expect anything in school to make sense, and they've given up trying to make sense.*

The articles in this issue reflect teachers who respect learners, who provide students an idea of what they're supposed to learn and why. P.L. 94-142 mandated the learning rights of all students, handicapped or not. Handicap is used not only in medicine and education, but also in golf and horseracing where it is recognized that not all participants have an equal chance of success. Allowances are made to equate the participants: in any given group, or classroom, there is a range of capacities, abilities, and potentialities; while not literally "contestants," these participants are to be provided least restrictive opportunities to learn. In these articles we see efforts by teachers to provide for learning by students of varying capacities—from the learning disabled to the learning talented.

... Readers should know too that, because of the exceptional teachers who are its members, VATE is an exceptional professional organization. VATE is, for example, the second largest affiliate within NCTE. Each year the VATE position is heard on many issues; in 1981, VATE took its position on the Standards of Learning Program to the State Department of Education and on Revisions of Certification Regulations to the State Board of Education. Annually VATE holds one of the finest and most practical conventions available to teachers; it has a Committee Against Censorship to provide assistance to teachers and school divisions under attack; it has a speakers bureau, and affords numerous other services to the membership. Members receive four issues of the newsletter, *The Needle's Eye*, and two issues of the journal, *Virginia English*

*Bulletin*, each calendar year. An excellent analysis of where one's dues go was presented in the February issue of *The Needle's Eye*. VATE points with pride to the *Bulletin*. The *Bulletin* possesses a national readership which values the quality and variety of writing. Every year individual pieces or entire issues are cited or published elsewhere. Both 1981 issues, for instance, were selected for incorporation in ERIC'S *Resources in Education*. NCTE has selected the Winter 1981 issue, guest edited by Leila Christenbury, for national distribution.

### **Exceptional Writers 1981 NCTE Achievement Award Winners**

From over 7000 entrants in the 1981 NCTE Achievement Awards in Writing Program approximately 800 students were cited for excellence in writing. Included were 20 Virginia high school seniors who had, in the spring semester of their junior year, submitted samples of their best work and responses to an impromptu theme written under controlled conditions. The 1982 Awards Competition is underway. VATE congratulates these 1981 winners from Virginia.

BAME, DAVID, W. T. Woodson H.S., Fairfax  
 BLEDSOE, MATHEW, Thomas Dale H.S., Chester  
 CHILDERS, DOUGLAS LEE, Douglas Southall Freeman H.S., Richmond  
 COOK, MILES REUBEN, Oakton H.S., Vienna  
 FIELD, DAVID BENSON, Robert E. Lee H.S., Springfield  
 FOGG, STEVEN W., James Wood H.S., Ridge Campus, Winchester  
 GIBSON, LAURA ALLISON, Orange County H.S.  
 HARNEY, PAUL E., Annandale H.S.  
 HILLER, JOHN, West Springfield H.S.  
 KIDWELL, RHANNA, Jefferson-Huguenot-Wythe H.S., Richmond  
 LAKE, KEVIN, Thomas Jefferson H.S., Alexandria  
 MARTIN, MARY K., Saint Catherine's School, Richmond  
 MILGRAUM, MICHAEL MANDY, Albemarle H.S., Charlottesville  
 MUSSER, JAN CHRISTIANA, Drewry Mason H.S., Ridgeway  
 ORR, LISA MARIE, Washington-Lee H.S., Arlington  
 PHILLIPS, ELISA ANNE, George Washington Carver H.S., Fieldale  
 RICE, LAURA ALICE, South Lane H.S., Reston  
 THOMAS, DAVID UTZURRUM, E. C. Glass H.S., Lynchburg  
 TUCKER, ANDREW DUNN, Henrico H.S., Richmond  
 VIGODA, VALERIE BETH, Langley H.S., McLean

## Exceptional Teachers Judging in the Achievement Awards Competition

Every year twenty or more Virginia teachers devote part of May and June to assessing entries in NCTE's Achievement Awards in Writing Program. They perform this activity as a service for which they receive no remuneration—and hardly any recognition. They are completing an academic year filled with its usual concerns, yet they choose to add additional stacks of papers to their already strained workloads. They are professionals; they are exceptional teachers.

In March and April, NCTE invites the judges to serve. The state coordinator forms the judges into teams, having one college and one secondary school person on each team. The written materials are organized into sets and sent to the first judge on the team in May. In June the second judge on the team receives the material from the first judge. Each judge reads all the papers in the set and recommends which students should be finalists. The independent recommendations are sent to the state coordinator along with the papers, and he/she must take these recommendations and reduce the number to the allotted quota of finalists for the state. This figure is determined by the number of state representatives in Congress doubled.

Virginia teachers have been performing this service for the past twenty-four years. Over that time, hundreds of Virginia teachers have participated—some for many of those years. Their reward is clearly an intrinsic one, and VATE salutes them for their interest and concern.

### 1981 VIRGINIA JUDGES

H. THOMAS CALLAHAN, Chesapeake  
JERRY CLARK, Big Stone Gap  
DEBORAH GODDIN, Poquoson  
BARBARA GREENE, Norfolk  
ELLEN T. GRIFFIN, Henrico  
ADA S. HILL, Chesterfield  
HELEN KRELL, Arlington  
KATHLEEN LELAND, Hampton  
CAROLYN W. ROGERS, Norton  
DEBORAH SCOTT, Norfolk  
JOYCE J. SWINDELL, Norfolk  
LINDA WARREN, Chesapeake  
LEON WILLIAMS, Roanoke County

JUNE YOST, Goochland  
DONALD GALLEHR, George Mason  
University  
JAMES McTEE, Virginia State  
University  
JANET MILLER, Old Dominion  
University  
WARREN SELF, Radford University  
PAUL SLAYTON, Mary Washington  
College  
BONNIE WYNN, New River  
Community College

State coordinator for 1981 was Charles Stallard (Old Dominion University). The 1982 coordinator is Pamela Gay, also of Old Dominion. For more information contact Ms. Gay or NCTE.

## Practically Partners: Remedial Language Instruction

ALMA B. HALL

As one of two teachers involved in a three-year Virginia State Pilot Program in remedial and content area reading for low-achieving eighth graders, it was my responsibility to reinforce reading skills in the English area for a selected group of exceptional students. Random pupil scheduling into basic classes had previously presented me with fairly typical remedial students during my fifteen-year teaching career. But this year would be different! I would have one hundred twenty students in four basic classes, randomly selected from among those whose actual reading achievement was two or more grade levels behind their expected level. The research design was chosen, suitable materials were ordered, and a curriculum was carefully planned, tailored to remedial reading instruction with content reading instruction in English. From the outset, I sensed that this group would be different from the other basic classes I had taught. The Hawthorne effect notwithstanding, past successes and failures with other exceptional groups pointed me in the direction of teacher-pupil relationship and the role it must play in effective language instruction. I needed to share in my students' learning activities, to involve myself in language experiences so totally that I could become a partner who would help them carry their own responsibilities.

The structure of a research design is generally restrictive; but there is also an instructional "variable" that is intrinsic to the study, that of the practitioner's view operating throughout the framework of the design. Statistical data on pre- and post-testing indicates the ultimate success of a program, and at the end of the first year our students had shown a statistically significant mean growth of twelve months' reading achievement in nine calendar months. Factors such as suitability of materials and manageability of class size do weigh heavily in a program's success; so, too, must the "level of confidence" between teacher and pupils weigh importantly, even though it cannot figure into the data. After status reports had been filed and the aura of success had diminished, I internalized the program's more human values: the teacher of basic students gives in direct proportion to what the students lack. Where there is student reluctance to read, the teacher drives eagerly forward by reading aloud frequently; where the student breaks down in oral and written expression, the teacher jacks up the sentence for quick repair; whenever the frustrations become too great for both parties, they yield to the moment by stepping from the tracks just long enough to smile at each other before they return to the designated route.

*Alma B. Hall is a seventh and eighth grade reading and English teacher at Brandon Junior High in Virginia Beach.*

The following responses, and some of the activities these responses describe, came when I pointedly asked my experimental students at the end of the year, "Why do you think you're a better reader now?"

DANNY: *"Because we read real stuff...like I think I got more responsibility now 'cause I read the newspaper."*

Our one-day-a-week delivery of the local newspaper became such an anticipated and sharing activity that, when an unavoidable delay meant meeting the students at the door one Thursday without the paper to distribute, their rage was tantamount to rebellion! I learned to share my morning routine habit, and we became reading partners of the daily press. From the paper each student decided upon merchandise or a service from the want ads, and in the process of selecting ads and writing inquiry letters, they were learning how a bulk of information was categorized and how to use an index to locate what they wanted. Before planning an imaginary trip out of town, we gathered weather information from the forecast map, and in the process sharpened map-reading skills by using legends. We argued about a citizen's letter to the editor on the local upsurge in crime, and at the same time learned to distinguish fact from opinion. We followed one newsworthy item during its development for an entire month, and experienced cause and effect and sequence by inductively reasoning how these events produced the outcomes. We marched through the lead paragraphs on the front page, and were able to delineate main ideas and supporting details.

I surmise that remedial students find a more tangible world in the newspaper, an outside world they may have to occupy sooner than their more successful peers.

"And why do you think you're a better reader, Yvonne?"

YVONNE: *"Because we read things the way they really are, like poetry is really song lyrics...and short stories are really life plays."*

Yvonne was referring to a newspaper feature article we read on a local teenager who had written and recorded several hit tunes. When we located him, he agreed to share several hours with us before he left for a Los Angeles promotion tour. He would enjoy using this young audience as a sounding board for some of his latest lyrics. What an opportunity to begin poetry appreciation! He came; he strummed his tunes; he sold students on the idea of writing to be set to music. He brought copies of his records to distribute, and I duplicated his lyrics for visual reinforcement. The students were convinced that private feelings could be shared through music, given careful word choice and development of the mood. Abstract feelings were turned into dialogue, poetic dialogue, and the students learned to handle the frequently intricate punctuation patterns of dialogue.

The songwriter had given us a glimpse into the world of music, radio programming, and the life of the disc jockey. After working together

with the teacher to turn a short story into a play, with dialogue and narration suitable for a radio play, students were able to work in small groups on other translations. During the writing act students were unaware of their sentence-combining techniques, changes to more dynamic vocal expressions, condensations of descriptive paragraphs to explicit sentences as they tried to "get on with it." While few of these language activities can be done without considerable patterning and guidance from the teacher, groups of three or four students working on one writing project create a classroom atmosphere not unlike a newsroom, with the teacher-editor moving among the groups to offer assistance. Tasks such as these have greater completion percentages when there is competition among groups for producing a script that is judged good enough by peers to be tape-recorded.

"Sondra, why do you think you're a better reader now?"

SONDRA: *"Because it's the first time I had somebody who wanted to hear me read to them."*

Vocalizing is very difficult for many remedial students as they attend to one word rather than word patterns when reading aloud. Even repeated rehearsals with selected passages produce limited success in proper phrasing. Simple sentence patterns and the easy vocabulary of children's books provided the perfect source for oral reading, and Sondra was referring to a group of young children she read to numerous times during the school year. With the proximity of an elementary school, it seemed a perfect match to have basic students read aloud to groups of kindergarten children in order to experience a real audience for this language experience. With the help of a kindergarten teacher, I discussed the types of books that are most appealing to the preschooler and the techniques of introducing a story, using visual aids, handling the book to make the most of illustrations, and preparing a story follow-up such as drawing pictures of their own to take home. The children's room at the public library provided the source for making their book selections. Class time was given to helping students with expression, enunciation, and phrasing. Even the most reticent students, who merely observed their classmates on the first few visits to the kindergarten, were eventually cajoled into participating. Reading frustration was minimized because phrasing and vocabulary from these primary books was manageable for them. In the kindergarten classroom, on the floor with a group of little ones, there was not the threat that is so often experienced when there is the traditional audience of teacher and peers. Sondra was especially pleased with her success as she began a regular storytime with several young children in her neighborhood.

These language activities were relevant and they were fun. As teacher and students worked through the experiences together, these strategies undoubtedly strengthened the human element upon which language facility should be based: partnership learning.

## Helping a Dyslexic Student to Improve Her Spelling

ERIC HIBBISON

One of my students in a spelling course had been diagnosed as a dyslexic years ago. In spelling, her dyslexia showed up as occasional reversals of letters (*p* and *b*, for instance) and transpositions (such as *wrost* for *worst*). But generally her spellings showed little phonic ability (as in *guckies* for *drunkenness*). She had no illusions about finding instant solutions, but she studied diligently. I offered to work with her outside of class using a language arts approach which I explained. She was willing to try it.

On our first meeting, I had a pile of magazine photos ready. I asked her to select a picture that might pique her imagination. The conversation was audio taped. She told me about the picture she had selected and I occasionally asked leading questions. I later typed out what she had said and gave her both the cassette and the typed "script."

She had demonstrated in class that she could copy accurately. Her instructions, therefore, were to select the ten most difficult words in the script, copy them one by one, and study them. After studying the ten words, she was to play the cassette and write each of the ten words as they occurred in what she said—without looking at the script or her copied list. Then she was to check her work against the list.

On this first attempt, she spelled four of the ten words accurately on the self test. Even the misspelled words, however, were only one letter off. Previously, when she had gamely taken a spelling test with the rest of the class, she had correctly spelled only two of twenty-five words. Her misspellings had usually involved more than two letters.

Encouraged by the results of the first session, we tried again with a slight change. She chose a picture from a magazine at home and talked about it into a cassette. After she brought the cassette in for transcription, she studied the ten words she had selected as most difficult. She tested herself with the cassette and checked her work. This time, however, she was to break the words on her list into syllables by looking for each word in a dictionary. On her self-test, she spelled all ten words correctly.

Her work on later pictures, although not completely accurate, was still promising. She has no illusions about becoming a spelling champion or a secretary, but because she has seen some progress, her willingness to study has increased.

*Eric Hibbison is an associate professor of English at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College. Among the courses he teaches are ones in the developmental program.*

What happened? Her speaking vocabulary was larger than her writing vocabulary; therefore, she knew more words than she could spell. She was able to make some headway with a method that moved words from her speaking vocabulary to her writing vocabulary. This movement was accomplished by showing her in type the words she used in speaking and by having her take the words in parts. Her words were studied in context rather than in isolation, so her knowledge of what each word meant was enhanced by the context of her script. Knowing what a word means helps spelling accuracy. The directive to study the syllables of the words countered her tendency to attempt the whole word as a unit—and hence to lose syllables. Several of the words on her list were two or three syllables long, so the words from her speaking vocabulary included opportunities for her to study syllables. Since she could already copy accurately, she displayed some short-term memory. The steps she went through with the cassette player and script seemed to reinforce the words from her speaking vocabulary. The reinforcement built into this study procedure appeared to aid her short-term retention for spelling through visual, auditory, and written (tactile) reminders.

One demonstrated benefit to her study of syllables has been her increased ability to distinguish smaller units of sound. We have nearly completed a study of blends, diphthongs and vowel sounds. Her work has been promisingly accurate. Tremendous amounts of reinforcement will be needed to retain even a portion of what she has learned for any length of time, but she has been motivated by her modest success.

## **"Jammin' Mixture": Creative Writing for the Language Disabled**

VICTORIA L. KENNEDY

Engaging traditionally disabled readers and writers in a publication project such as a literary magazine is workable, I discovered, provided that alternate learning styles and practices are used. A student may have a brilliant idea for a story, but she may find it necessary to submit to a skill-wise detour. If she suffers from dysgraphia or some other fine motor skill handicap, for instance, the use of a tape recorder is helpful in capturing creative spurts. As long as oral language can be heard, documentation by an able individual is possible and encouraged.

I have been teaching high school English and reading for eight years in a program that classifies students according to reading abilities. Pupils assigned to phase I English/reading classes are those who read at the 0.0 to fourth grade level. Phase II represents reading levels 4.1 to 6.0; phase III, levels 6.1 to 7.9; phase IV—levels 8.0 and beyond; and phase V—honors. My experience in working with a class of phase I students who possessed individual reading and language problems taught me that these students, often bordering between special education and regular placement, sometimes display surprising linguistic talent. Despite obvious academic disabilities, these students last year managed to compile an effective, well-organized, and comprehensive magazine.

The class consisted of fifteen high school inner-city students (there were 20 on the roll but not all attended regularly), grades nine through twelve, and ages fifteen to twenty; five were female, ten male. One student had been mainstreamed into the class from a special education self-contained setting, and three had been removed from the special education program as a result of parental objection. The cast of characters included two star athletes, a "lady's man," a father of two pre-school children, one pregnant teen, a stutterer, a non-communicator, a pageant beauty, and an obese female. Their language arts problems encompassed classical dyslexia, speech disorders, the inability to spell and punctuate, nonrecognition of basic sight words, little knowledge of grammatical and usage rules, and degrees of dysgraphia. The class was originally composed of two seniors, who eventually withdrew due to attendance deficiency, three juniors, two of whom withdrew, five sophomores, and ten freshmen.

The student editor was a sixteen-year-old dyslexic—confused, frustrated, and highly intelligent. He produced an excellent repertoire of

*Vicki Kennedy is a teacher of English at Marshall-Walker High School in Richmond. Among her classes are those for low-achievers and non-readers.*

original, entertaining fiction and poetry which I had to transcribe for the magazine. The assistant editor was a nineteen-year-old sophomore who displayed artistic talent, admirable common sense, and an impressive ability to organize efficiently. Remaining staff members included experts on sports statistics, those who enjoyed designing word puzzles and creating recipes, or who were proficient with rhymes, jokes, riddles, and puns. The combination was a winning one, notwithstanding the incredible language arts bankruptcy. As long as the creative element of ideas existed within the class, I did not object to additional tasks of editing, typing, revising, and other chores that accomplished the job.

In designing the writing effort, I emphasized and implemented these concepts:

- Writing for a specific audience.
- Discovering and developing individual talents, skills and differences in writing.
- Using multisensory learning styles through visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic techniques to produce written composition.
- Teaching the business of journalism by covering basic communicative arts functions.
- Strengthening writing competencies by capitalizing upon student interests in creating a publication.
- Helping students develop positive self-concepts by placing them in class positions of authority and "assembly line" teamwork.

Students were responsible for submitting magazine assignments three times weekly. Student editors and the faculty sponsor decided which selections were accepted for publication. All submitted material, regardless of caliber, earned credit toward the class members' nine-weeks' English grades. Assignments were completed in a modality that was most suitable for the student. For example, equivalent class credit was received for oral, written, sketched and recorded material. The ultimate goal, however, was to transfer the nonwritten performances to writing. *Jammin' Mixture* was the publication's title. "Jammin'" is black inner-city terminology meaning "to have a good time." "Mixture" represents the multi-grade, achievement, and age levels of the class population.

Two students typify some of the linguistic barriers and learning-resistant attitudes we had to confront.

"To inche staer have colun togete one East and wrest. Befo form dutt gacke. The are to mend cremet thu mase gene creten a plalet. Shout of paun a difed paves of beteret." Dexter, a sixteen-year-old dyslexic, wrote this introduction to a science fiction short story. Translated, it reads, "Two enchanted stars have collided together...one from the East and one from the West. Both from different galaxies, they are to mate and create the Messiah's greatest creation—a planet, a shelter of peace and a divine paradise of beauty."

The procedure of student writing and instructor translation was the daily routine established each time a magazine assignment was given to Dexter. To expose Dexter to variations of writing styles of celebrated authors, I read aloud to him excerpts which I felt would improve his technique: Ray Bradbury, Willa Cather, Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni, Ernest Hemingway, T. S. Eliot, and other authors of works I chose for this learning procedure.

Punctuation rules were taught through the emphasis placed upon my voice as I read selected samples of author's contributions. Use of quotation marks in dialogue and new paragraph procedures were also introduced in this manner. Grammatical information was related orally; Dexter followed along by studying the printed words in workbooks and texts. He appeared to comprehend grammatical usage better when a sentence was given with two choices of responses in parentheses: "The group (was, were) afraid of its leader." The reasons for either choice, whether correct or incorrect, were always required.

Although this learning disabled teenager had previously composed three or four lengthy pieces of fiction, we chose to feature his latest contribution, "The New Creation of God," which consisted of six mini-chapters. Dexter worked on this story for approximately one month. Proofreading and editing were accomplished by my oral reading of the text, accompanied by oral interruptions, corrections, deletions and additions made by Dexter.

Nineteen-year-old Ronald, unlike Dexter, appeared to have neither ambition for the future nor the desire to succeed in any activity. When asked why he was not producing, he usually responded, "I don't know. Most of the time I don't feel good." Ronald was then asked if he cared about receiving an education. A three-fold response ensued: first, the habitual shoulder shrug, next a negative twist of the head, and finally, a positive nod. One might wonder if Ronald comprehended anything at any given time.

One of the highlights of the magazine project occurred when this lackadaisical adolescent created a "Seek'n' Find" name game for the entertainment section. Ronald chose to design a word puzzle which contained the names of each class member. The object of the puzzle is to locate diagonally, vertically, horizontally, forward or backward a name included in the master key which appears below the puzzle.

This youth spent five days in painstaking concentration. The rectangle surrounding the alphabetical maze measured four and one-half by six inches. There were seventeen rows and fifteen columns of letters with which to contend. Cleverly hidden among the masses of alphabets were eighteen names, including the magazine title. It was incredible that this student was able to spell accurately and recall the names of his classmates, even those who had withdrawn or been transferred. How uncanny it seemed for an individual who had previously displayed diffi-

culties in perceiving spatial relations to work, seemingly at ease, with a maddening assortment of letters, spelling words in multi-directions—a feat that would confuse a non-learning disabled person.

Another activity we tried was group writing and choral creation. We used the rap song, a fairly recent phenomenon of the post-disco musical era. Components of this medium consist of a simplistic formula: a dominant, steady, repetitive beat in moderate two-four time, serving as a background for a single or small group effort which talks or “raps” in rhythm to the beat. This “rapping” includes rich, figurative language, chiefly the element of rhyme; also, intentional grammatical errors which emulate Black English street colloquialisms. I have marveled at the speed with which students have been able to memorize all of the words to a ten minute rap song. Unfortunately, these same individuals cannot or will not commit to memory ten fifth grade spelling words or a few lines from a Shakespearean drama.

During the unit on poetry, I suggested to the class that an original rap song-poem be written by the entire group. The procedures included:

- Introductory lyrics written to rhythmically coincide with the chosen model.
- Each student composing his/her own line in the roll call segment of the rap poem. For example, “Here comes Al, yeah he’s our pal!”
- Each line created by trial and error. General lingual efforts amounted to a 40% student and 60% teacher ratio.
- Recording the lyrics on large sheets of poster board.
- Students copying the entire poem, committing it to memory, and reciting it in unison to appropriate background music.

When completed, *Jammin’ Mixture* consisted of: Fantasy (short stories), Freedom (poetry), Discus Throw (musical recordings), Flick (movies), S. A. (essays/commentary), Vaudeville (entertainment), Ragtime (fashion), Chow (food), Bookworm (book reviews), Rap (talk-song-poetry), Score (sports), and Easel (art). The students had produced a readable and interesting magazine. I had come to realize that learning disabled students, when motivated, were capable of some surprising and relatively sophisticated linguistic efforts; that they could learn in their own way many of the skills we were expected to teach them.

**Ideas Up and Down, All Around**

KRISTIE MCGUIRE

*There are ideas on your nose,  
On the toenails of your toes,  
And on your mom's designer hose.  
Ideas up and down, all around.  
Ideas in this world, they abound.*

These are lyrics from a song I wrote for a class of gifted and talented fourth graders who seemed to suffer from anxiety attacks at the mere mention of creative writing. The shifting in their seats, the sudden urge to go to the bathroom, and the blank stares all pointed to one conclusion; they didn't see themselves as sources for ideas, ergo; they didn't see themselves as writers.

*There are ideas out in space,  
They are written on your face,  
And on the shelves of your bookcase.  
Ideas up and down, all around.  
Ideas in this world, they abound.  
Yes, ideas in this world, just look around!*

I knew I had to convince them that they were sources for ideas and that ideas were all around them. But first, I had to teach them where to look. That's when I decided there was a need for visuals to accompany the song. I took pictures of everyday objects they often visually overlooked: signs, flooring, and buildings. I matched the pictures and song lyrics to form a slide show demonstrating the connection between ideas in the environment and the think/write process.

After viewing the slide show the ambience of my classroom changed! The conversation that day convinced the students one does not create from a vacuum. They also saw their teacher as a model for writing and a risk taker as well. They began to see the need for idea generation. They were turned on to thinking, but they weren't ready for writing yet. I decided to use Alex Osborn's brainstorming method to discuss objects the students had seen in the slides. We followed these rules for brainstorming: NO CRITICISM, WILD IDEAS ACCEPTED, QUALITY A MUST, HITCHHIKING WELCOME.

Hitchhiking involves taking a ride on someone else's idea and improving it or combining it with another idea. In order to know when

*Kristie J. McGuire teaches fourth grade at White Oaks Elementary in Fairfax County.*

this was happening in the classroom, I simply asked the students to put up their thumbs as if they wanted to take a ride. This procedure quickly took care of the old cries of "But that was my idea!" The children started sharing ideas and working together.

The questioning strategies used progressed from low level to high level thinking skills. We then looked at the four abilities needed in creativity. We had successfully learned how to generate ideas, next we needed to know how to be creative in our implementation:

- FLUENCY—retrieving information quickly and in quantity.
- FLEXIBILITY—changing one type of thought to another.
- ORIGINALITY—producing unique ideas or concepts.
- ELABORATION—completing an idea.

After discussing each of these abilities, we added another dimension to our brainstorming process. Following a session, we would look at all of the ways we had been creative. We counted the ways in which we had been fluent or flexible in our thinking. I used flow charts and diagrams so the students could see their thinking in action and note those areas in which they needed to work. As we exchanged ideas day after day, I recognized the need to show the children how habitual thought patterns hamper creativity. We would take an object for brainstorming, generate some ideas and then expand them into descriptive sentences. We then analyzed the quality of each sentence: Was it descriptive? Did it create a picture for the reader? Was it clear? Were metaphors used or was it dull and lifeless? Were old clichés used or was it original?

We looked at the difference between sentences like:

*The grass is always greener on the other side.*

As opposed to:

*His face was as white as an unbandaged finger.*

Students were starting to understand that if they wanted to become more creative they had to break away from habitual ways of looking at things. As I watched their faces and listened to their ideas, I realized they were itching to write. They had learned to be critical analyzers of their work.

Our first writing assignment dealt with simple sentences. I wanted the students to experience immediate success. The directions were to choose an object and manipulate it, using any one of the combinations we had learned during brainstorming and then write a sentence describing it. Later we progressed from paragraphs to short stories and beyond. Here is a sample of the process students followed:

| Object             | Minimize              | Maximize              | Combine                                                                                  |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The American flag. | A wash rag or kleenex | A carpet or bedspread | Combine with a piece of notebook paper and music and come up with a new national anthem. |

If the American flag were a washrag, we could wash the country's problems away.

Tim Gooding

As the students became more proficient, they dropped the explanation portion of their writing and applied the thinking skills they had previously learned. They had mastered the most important part; how to create an idea and carry it out. When the students shared their writing in class, I could tell by their comments and the quality of their work that they had learned how to think and to evaluate their thinking processes, a skill much needed in the revision stage of writing.

I had learned a great deal too. I found that students don't create fruitful prose on a teacher's enthusiasm alone. They usually don't know where to begin in writing and need techniques to get them going. They also need to develop higher level thinking skills to help them synthesize the information they are trying to relate to their readers. Students further need to be allowed the freedom to peruse the effects that habit has upon their thought processes.

### NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM NCTE

Write NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Rd., Urbana, IL 61801

Arthur Applebee, *Writing in the Secondary School: English and the Content Area* (1981, stock no. 58846; \$7, NCTE member \$6)

Johannessen, Kahn, Walter, *Designing and Sequencing Prewriting Activities* (1982, stock no. 10843; \$4, NCTE members \$3.50)

Linda Lamme, *Learning to Love Literature: Preschool Through Grade 3* (1981, stock no. 27878; \$9.50, NCTE members \$8)

Imogene Springer, *Recommended English Language Arts Curriculum Guides K-12* (1982, stock no. 39515; \$1.40, NCTE members \$1.00)

## **Bridging the Writing Gap for the EMR Mainstreamed Child**

SANDRA B. COHEN and PATRICIA CROOK

Special educators, recognizing the need to establish curricular goals and instructional techniques based on the child's ultimate life setting, have been emphasizing teaching the development of functional skills which are chronologically-age appropriate in natural settings. Resource teachers are thus examining existing curricular practices and devising avenues which lead to appropriate learning goals for mainstreamed youngsters. A functional skills approach can be valid in the development of each educable mentally retarded (EMR) child's Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). Utilizing the resource teacher's expertise, regular classroom teachers could alter elements of the learning environment and help the EMR child attain functional goals which will have the highest probability of serving life-setting needs.

The classroom teacher has the responsibility of understanding and implementing for the handicapped child the educational objectives established in the IEP. These objectives, written in accordance with the child's educational needs, are intended to be relevant to the ultimate educational goals (career and personal) of that student. For the EMR child, most objectives are designed to help achieve life-time independence. In the area of writing this means a program emphasizing practical communication: simple notes to friends and employers, job applications, banking and checking account forms, magazine subscriptions, and credit information. Educable children understand the intent of such writing and feel a sense of accomplishment in the completion of meaningful activity. The retarded child's motivation and subsequent learning increases with the relevance of the task.

In the mainstreamed classroom the teacher should consider adapting learning programs that enable the entire class, including the EMR child, to advance toward their predetermined educational goals. The expected life role, for instance, will highlight the type of writing that the child will ultimately be required, or in some cases inspired, to produce. As long as the EMR child is allowed to express personal thoughts, even within a practical framework, creative thought processes will be encouraged. Significantly for the EMR student, this would be achieved with the realization of the child's special needs and abilities.

The regular classroom teacher's dilemma is not whether to teach writing to the EMR student but how to teach writing. A functional writ-

*At the University of Virginia, Sandra Cohen is associate professor of special education and Patricia Crook is assistant professor of elementary education.*

ing program need not be boring, overly simplistic, or isolated as a subject area. The program can encompass many of the tenets of a creative writing program allowing the child to integrate practical language skills and self-expression. The teacher's high expectations for each child will ultimately promote higher levels of attainment.

The mainstreamed EMR pupil's functional writing program should be designed to incorporate small sequential learning steps, opportunities for repeated practices, and generalization activities. These three elements, along with motivation provided by relevant assignments, relate directly to the learning characteristics of the EMR population. The major components embodied in a functional writing product include self-expression, vocabulary, information and mechanics. Self-expression represents the writer's creative input into the communication and establishes the framework for the selection of vocabulary, information and format. Functional vocabulary, factual information, and writing mechanics satisfy the content and stylistic core and allow the writer to communicate thoughts, needs, and feelings at the most effective level.

Writing activities should be initiated on a daily basis and organized to increase writing fluency. Incidental instruction will not generally help. Workbooks and ditto sheets, though they may have their place, will not substitute for carefully planned teaching. Functional writing skills delineated by specific teaching components and related activities are illustrated in Figure 1.

The underlying assumption is that the classroom teacher's efforts can help most EMR children who normally experience some difficulty with writing tasks. *Daily practice with writing skills within the context of meaningful communication is essential.* Mastery of writing mechanics will occur as the child senses a need for more effective communication.

FIGURE 1

| <i>Skill Area</i> | <i>Component</i>  | <i>Simple Task Goals</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Self-expression   | Manual expression | The student can: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. portray a specific emotion non-verbally for the class to identify (e.g. sadness, frustration, anger, excitement).</li> </ol>                                                                                                     |
|                   | Verbal expression | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. arrange picture cards in a story sequence.</li> <li>2. tell a story about a given picture stimulus.</li> <li>3. complete an oral sentence or story.</li> <li>4. spontaneously tell a story.</li> <li>5. carry on a basic conversation.</li> </ol> |

| <i>Skill Area</i>     | <i>Component</i>      | <i>Simple Task Goals</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Functional Vocabulary | Receptive Vocabulary  | <p>The student can:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. follow directions to perform specific tasks. (e.g. these should be tasks ranging from motor activity to project construction).</li> <li>2. match pictures to an oral word stimulus (e.g. desk, bus, worker, clock).</li> <li>3. match pictures to an oral sentence stimulus (e.g. This is a grocery store).</li> </ol>                                                                                                                 |
|                       | Expressive Vocabulary | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. label pictures representing words such as: worker, employer, letter, danger, telephone.</li> <li>2. use words such as job, application, address, in a sentence.</li> <li>3. give a simple definition for functional words (e.g. complete, demonstrate, dial).</li> <li>4. respond to simple questions (e.g. What do you call this object?).</li> <li>5. develop appropriate questions to gather information (e.g. What time does the movie start?).</li> </ol> |
| Factual Information   | Personal Information  | <p>The student can:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. answer questions concerning personal identification (e.g. name, address, age, phone number).</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                       | General Information   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. respond to questions about elements of the environment (e.g. What is the weather like today?).</li> <li>2. approach problems in such a way as to arrive at appropriate solutions. (e.g. If I have to be here at 8:00 what time do I have to leave?).</li> <li>3. develop questions to gain information needed to complete a task. (e.g. Where do I find construction paper?).</li> </ol>                                                                       |

|                       |                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                       |                       | 4. write statements of a factual nature<br>(e.g. We have a school holiday<br>because of Washington's birthday).                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Writing<br>Mechanics  | Handwriting           | The student can:<br><br>1. produce legible written letter forms<br>in either manuscript or cursive<br>style.                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                       | Spelling              | 1. correctly spell words important<br>for the student's personal history<br>(e.g. name, mother's name, etc.).<br><br>2. correctly spell the words important<br>to the student's written expression.<br><br>3. accurately spell the most commonly<br>used words when they are dictated<br>(e.g. Dolch list). |
|                       | Punctuation           | 1. supply appropriate punctuation<br>marks for given sentences (letters,<br>forms, etc.).<br><br>2. punctuate his/her own written work<br>samples correctly.                                                                                                                                                |
|                       | Capitalization        | 1. correctly capitalize given sentences<br>(letters, forms, etc.).<br><br>2. use capitalization correctly on<br>his/her own written work samples.                                                                                                                                                           |
|                       | Organization          | 1. develop complete clear sentences.<br><br>2. arrange sentences to express a<br>logical thought sequence.                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Functional<br>Writing | Initiatory<br>Writing | The student can:<br><br>1. compose greeting notes to friends.<br><br>2. write letters expressing needs,<br>feelings and/or facts.<br><br>3. write requests for services (e.g.<br>using a mail order catalogue form).                                                                                        |
|                       | Responsive<br>Writing | 1. complete all questions on an<br>application form.<br><br>2. complete all questions on a<br>subscription (magazine, record<br>club) form.<br><br>3. complete all elements required on<br>banking forms.                                                                                                   |

The resource teacher's role in generating the functional writing program for the mainstreamed EMR child includes helping the classroom teacher accept a functional skills approach within the writing curriculum; analyzing the present writing program to determine those areas from which all children can benefit and those activities which should be highlighted for the EMR child; sequencing activities and supplementary tasks which lead to increased writing skill; and committing time each day for writing practice either in the resource room or regular classroom as a necessary component of the child's program. The reward for both teacher and child is embedded in experiencing some success each day as the child visibly progresses, step by step, toward clearer written communication.

### CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

The 1982 Winter Issue of *Virginia English Bulletin* will focus on 1. *Making Effective Assignments* and 2. *Coping with Reduced Budgets*. Manuscripts, not to exceed 5-8 pages, should be sent to the editor.

Authors may describe effective assignments they have made (literature, usage, grammar, writing, speaking, listening, media, *et al*), or they may focus on initiating or intervening or responding to assignments.

Authors may also make suggestions for coping with reduced budgets or for implementing the Standards of Learning Program.

DEADLINE: OCTOBER 1, 1982

### CURRICULUM MATERIALS

The NCTE Committee to Evaluate Curriculum Guidelines and Competency Requirements is evaluating curriculum materials as a service to schools; identifying outstanding curriculum materials for display at the NCTE Annual Convention; compiling an annotated list of outstanding curriculum materials available for purchase by other schools. School districts wishing to have curriculum guides evaluated should mail *two copies* to Imogene Springer, Chair, at NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Enclose a cover letter explaining the background behind the development of the guide—personal statements that will help the evaluator get a "feel" for the district. Also, submit general information about the school population (ethnic groups, socioeconomic), and identify those who produced the curriculum materials.

## The Black and White of Composition

MARY DESJARLAIS CISKE

One morning three students from another teacher's class came into my room to borrow some dictionaries. "Hey, Miz Ciske," called out Herman, one of the twenty-five members of the all-black Fundamental English class. "What are them *white* boys doing in our class?"

I answered that I had not known my classroom had a color or race requirement. I reminded him that I was in there, and I was white. Herman laughed, "You not white; you the teacher!"

In that way I learned some laws of education that morning: Teachers are raceless and colorless, but classes are either black or white. Now I realize that for the first years of my teaching experience, the latter "law" has been true and, until this semester, I taught the "black classes." I did my student teaching in my college town's high school that was approximately seventy percent white and thirty percent black. The "Phase Three" classes that I taught were virtually all black. While working on my master's degree, I tutored reading in an all-black elementary school and did my thesis on black dialect. My first public school teaching experience was in a southern Maryland high school that was sixty percent white and forty percent black. Again, the classes I taught were predominately black. During the four years I taught evening classes in composition at a Maryland community college, my classes were virtually all black.

As a result of this homogeneous grouping and experience, I had become proficient in black language, culture, and educational needs. The students saw me as someone, raceless usually, who understood their language and educational needs and allowed me to guide them, ever so slowly and gently, into Standard English usage. We had a system, a logical, workable system, that I used with each class and with individual students.

My system came to an abrupt, even shocking halt, however, when I walked into my freshman English classes for the first time this semester. My first reaction was "They are *so* young." My second, and totally surprising, reaction was "Oh my, they're all white! !" There went my "Levels of the Language" introduction speech. Out flew my planned lessons on subject-verb agreement. I said goodbye to plans for writing first on dialect or "everyday" speech then rewriting in Standard English

*Mary Ciske now teaches at George Mason University. Before coming to George Mason, she taught at Lackey High in Indian Head, Maryland, and at a community college.*

as my former college students had done successfully. These classes would not need all of that. The students were all eighteen and nineteen-year-old suburban white kids who were familiar and comfortable with Standard English. They would not need lessons on getting non-standard dialect interference out of their writing. What was I going to say? What was I going to teach?

On the first or second day of class, I usually describe the many levels of usage—illiterate to technical—giving examples of each level, and explaining to the students that one's language, as long as it works, is never *wrong* but not always appropriate for the situation. I then give examples of dialect, slang, and "street language" and have the students tell me when and where each example would be appropriate and inappropriate. After establishing guidelines of sorts, we are able to "translate" the dialect or street language into Standard English. My black students always responded well to this presentation and, thereafter, approached their writing assignments with an understanding that their own language was accepted and respected even though they would be writing a different type of English from that which they spoke. With white students, this lesson was not necessary. There was not the chance that someone was going to be racially offended by my insistence that we write in Standard English. This semester, I defined Standard Written English and told the students we would be using formal Standard English only—no contractions, no "you" unless there is specific referrant, no slang, no clichés.

In teaching composition to black students, I have always had to teach subject-verb agreement quite early in the semester because black dialect routinely ignores this element of Standard English grammar, and the resulting deviance makes its way into the students' writing. It is consistent with black dialect to say or write "There go Dick" or "When I be talking on the phone, she bother me." After a few years of teaching grammar "as needed," I had amassed a wealth of tricks, games, and oral and written exercises to teach the students Standard American English. I had students watch the news on television or listen to it on the radio and write down exactly what they heard for several minutes to help them *hear* the difference between non-standard and standard usage. I also had them play a game in groups with index cards on which I had written words, phrases, and marks of punctuation. After all of the cards were dealt, each group had a predetermined amount of time to create as many standard English sentences as possible with their cards. Members of the groups earned points for forming a sentence and for correcting someone else's sentence. When an argument ensued over "Why isn't this right?" I stepped in and gave a quick grammar lesson to the questioner.

On the other hand, my present students make virtually no subject-verb agreement errors in their writing. Although some may say "I ain't going,"

or "He don't care," these forms do not show up in the student's writing. Unlike my former students, my present students are comfortable with Standard English even if they do not always use it in their informal or casual speech.

I like grammar. I like to teach grammar. I like to see students hear the difference in the coherence of a passage they have written when their subjects and verbs finally agree. Because my present students really do not need grammar lessons, I am not going to get to teach one of the things I like best.

I am also having to adjust to the differences in essay topics. With my black students I had gotten used to reading of their concerns about unemployment, single parenthood, making enough money to live on, crime and being able to "make it" in what many of them saw as a hostile, racially discriminatory world. They wrote about going to college to "make something" of themselves. Many of my community college students had spent time in the armed services before going to college, resulting in papers about army or navy experiences. These students had many social and political opinions they wanted to express. Often a black student would ask me to help express ideas to send to a newspaper, congressman, or councilperson. In other words, individually and collectively, they wanted to be heard.

In contrast, my present students' concerns are more immediate and much more personal. I am now reading about trips to the beach, reasons for lowering the drinking age, how to go through fraternity rush, and the day they got their driver's licenses. I find that I have to change my usual on-the-chalk-board examples because my questions about current events or social concerns draw blank faces. As a whole, they have no interest in unemployment. They describe crime as "bad" and single parenthood as "probably rough." Frankly, I was surprised by their lack of interest in the same topics my former students insisted on writing about. I was not prepared for it and have had to spend time trying to remember what it was like to be a young college freshman in order to develop in-class examples that will be relevant to my current classes.

I have, perhaps unconsciously, made an adjustment in my teaching style. I have always been a bit informal, though not casual, with black students because I prefer an informal approach and do not want to alienate an already wary group by appearing as the formal figure whom they will immediately distrust and resent. I had to be a resource, not an authority; I had to guide them, not lecture them. Many were not interested in what I knew; they wanted to tell me what they knew. It did, however, make a difference to some students that I had come from a large and definitely-not-rich family and that I am married and have children. They needed to know that we share some experiences in life because then they knew that I would understand what they were expressing about themselves. Now, however, I find myself being more

formal; not unfriendly, but reluctant to try to relate too personally with students. I think I am afraid they will think I am trying to be "one of them" instead of just the teacher. My black students and I knew I was not and would never be "one of them" so I was always at a certain comfortable distance. I have recently noticed that I am lecturing more. It seems that it is what the white college students want and expect, whereas black high school and community college students preferred question/answer group discussion lessons.

My students, black and white, all have personal and educational needs that have to be fulfilled. I have satisfied some of the needs of black students by making sure I understood those needs and building resources with which to meet them. Now that I have overcome my first day shock of "Oh my, they're all white" and "How do I relate to them?" I can begin adjusting and gathering resources once again. After all, as Herman said, "You not white; you the teacher."

## Writing for Younger Students

BROWNIE RITENOUR

In my class for advanced tenth graders, I like to include a unit on creative writing that also incorporates children's literature. My goal is for each student to write a book geared to the primary school child. I use this unit after the students have had experience with such pre-writing activities as looping, curbing, and journal writing.

The unit is introduced by the use of pattern books. Pattern books are written for primary students, but are excellent for teaching students the mechanics of book writing. By following the given pattern, students adapt the book to a teenage level. The students work in groups brainstorming and writing these books. The helping circle is used several times for rewriting. Each group has one completed book and the students do all their own art work.

Next I present the class with background information on the characteristics of the pre-school child and on the main parts of a children's book. I also give them a checklist of items to be aware of when reading children's literature.

Because the primary school is adjacent to our high school, I find it a valuable resource center. We spend three class periods in the primary school library reading books and keeping a record on the checklist. We subsequently return to the primary school to read our finished books to those students. Knowing they will have a real audience is a great motivator for my students.

Now the actual writing begins! I usually give the students a general starting point such as, write a Christmas story. I make no restrictions except that the story be suitable for a primary student. After several days are spent writing and rewriting with the use of the helping circle, the class is ready to discuss art work. One period is spent with the art teacher who explains color, cover design, lettering, etc. Each student must illustrate his own book. I proofread all rough drafts before they are put into book form. The realization of book writing now becomes apparent when the students must decide which words go on which pages. They also soon become exhausted with art work which must be repeated over and over.

When the books are completed the students return to the primary school. The primary school librarian makes the group reading arrangements. First, my students read to small groups of kindergarteners. Then they read one to one to first and second graders. The strengths and

*Brownie Ritenour teaches tenth grade English at Stonewall Jackson High in Mt. Jackson.*

weaknesses of the books are soon apparent. The students can also see a difference in the responses from the different age groups. This unit is very rewarding when we see the reaction of the primary school children. It is an experience that includes not only creative writing, but art, children's literature, child psychology, and book making.

#### CHECKLIST FOR READING CHILDREN'S BOOKS

1. Title
2. Author
3. For what age child is the book written?
4. What is the main plot?
5. Type of story—
  - a. fable
  - b. fantasy—animal?
  - c. how-to book
  - d. fairy tale
  - e. real life situation.
6. Pictures
  - a. drawings
  - b. sketches
  - c. cut-outs
  - d. Stick figures
  - e. photographs
7. Dialogue—
8. Humor—
9. What do you think is the strong point of this book?

## Recent Young Adult Literature Featuring Handicapped Characters

JO LESLIE SNELLER

Some of the recently published books featuring handicapped characters offer the reader a deeper understanding of human nature. The good books increase understanding of the ramifications of a handicap, certainly, but they also pull down barriers between people. These books allow the unimpaired readers to experience a lifestyle they may know little about, while seeing the humanness of the handicapped character. The weaker books, however, get so involved with the problems and mechanics of being handicapped that the characters are flat or so miserably sweet that one finds empathy impossible.

Probably the last thing a person in a wheelchair wants to read about is the trials of another recruit to the wheelchair set. Adolescents who happen to be blind, emotionally ill, deaf, lame, or otherwise handicapped know more than most authors about such difficulties, and desire, like the rest of us, to enjoy a varied diet of books. A boy or girl sitting all day would be the first to reach for books about sky divers, champion swimmers, top runners, brave dogs and horses, and other physical achievers. Introduce handicapped students to books like Howard Fast's *The Hessian* (1972, historical fiction) in which a group of Quakers shelter a wounded German soldier from their colonial neighbors, or Robb White's *Death-watch* (1972, adventure) in which a college boy needs money for school so badly that he becomes a guide on a desert hunting trip—and discovers *he* is the quarry, or Felice Holman's *Slake's Limbo* (1974, adventure) in which a very young, penniless teenager survives honorably for 121 days in the subways of New York.

Four books that are winners for students, handicapped or not, are Isabelle Holland's *The Man Without a Face* (1972), M. E. Kerr's *Is That You, Miss Blue?* (1975), Jan Slepian's *The Alfred Summer* (1980), and Betty Sue Crummin's *Let A River Be* (1978). *The Man Without a Face* features a fourteen-year-old male who needs to prove his own worth. Chuck decides his only hope for escape is to pass the entrance examination to St. Matthew's, a distant prep school. His aid comes in the form of a badly disfigured, cold man. As a deep friendship forms between the man and boy, Chuck learns even more important things than how to pass an entrance examination.

*Is That You, Miss Blue?* takes place at a school in Virginia where, as one character states, "anyone who lives at Charles School voluntarily is

*Jo Leslie Sneller is an associate professor of English at Longwood College. Among the classes she teaches is one on literature for adolescents.*

peculiar." The "peculiarities" of teachers and students include death fixation, social climbing, extreme vanity, vulgarity in the new rich, passionate love, embarrassing parents, religious fervor, and deafness. The book is at once haunting, funny, gripping and sad. But the character most likely to delight everyone is the gorgeous, deaf-and-speech-impaired Agnes. Agnes turns St. Charles upside down with her saintly look and nasty revenge schemes. Agnes is loyal, irreverent, and totally successful in confusing the hypocrites in power.

*The Alfred Summer* and *Let a River Be* present characters who are misfits in passionate pursuit of a goal. In *The Alfred Summer* four youth, one who is mentally slow, one who is a victim of cerebral palsy, one who needs to escape petticoat rule, and one who is a tomboy, build a boat, the *Alfred*. The boat sinks, but more important constructions rise in this sweetly-sad tale. *Let a River Be* analyzes an improbable friendship between a cursing, arthritic old woman and a beautiful, slow-learning young man named "Reetard." The two fight for a dying river—each one benefitting from the love and support of the other.

Non-impaired students can become empathetic with those who suffer various handicaps. Two recent non-fiction books are worth reading. *To Elvis, With Love* (1978) by Lena Canada is a detailed account of the friendship between a rootless nineteen-year-old and a nine-year-old severely crippled child. As the older girl earns the trust of her little friend, she discovers the pure and passionate love of the child for Elvis Presley. How the two come to Elvis' attention and how the child's last months of life are brightened by Elvis' friendship make sentimental reading. Rosalie Griesse's *The Crooked Shall Be Made Straight* (1979) tells what it is to be a "scolie"—a victim of scoliosis or lateral curvature of the spine. All of Griesse's tribulations, which included seven major operations and total immobility for months (fortunately most scolies today have greater ease and success in treatment), are told with a sense of humor and a delight in little pleasures: seeing a tugboat on the East River, working crossword puzzles, and meeting other people. One of Griesse's favorite fellow sufferers was Alice, a black teenager who had, among other overwhelming problems, no joints in her limbs. At one point the southern Alice said, " 'He [the doctor] done made me an elbow.' There was a contented sigh. 'Ah'm gonna be able tuh feed my-self!'" Alice's good nature and gratitude ring true in this account.

Two books on healthy, athletic teenaged males who suddenly find themselves paralyzed from the shoulders down are Lee Kingman's *Head Over Wheels* (1978) and Robin Brancato's *Winning* (1977). *Head Over Wheels* does a marvelous job exploring the effects of a major accident upon the victim's family. The book is, though quite realistic, a bit too negative in tone for comfortable identification with the victim. *Winning* does not make light of the problems of sudden paralysis, but it does exude optimism and offers hope in the form of loving parents,

friends, and teachers as the young man copes with his extreme adjustments.

Two other works which offer opportunities for empathetic reading include a play and a short novel. Bernard Pomerance's *The Elephant Man* (1979) would be suitable for more mature readers, but what a wealth of opportunities this play offers for exploring what it is to be physically repulsive in appearance while being internally sensitive and bright! The play is full of talk of mirrors, appearances, illusions, and a Victorian Society which is full of grotesque behavior disguised with silken manners.

*One Fat Summer* (1977), by Robert Lipsyte, is a heroic quest for dignity by fourteen-year-old Bobby Marks. Bobby says, "I weighed more than 200 pounds on July 4th. I didn't know exactly how much more because I jumped off the bathroom scale when the number 200 rolled up. The numbers were still climbing past the pointer when I bailed out." Before the summer is over, Bobby has worked for a sadist who underpays him, been kidnapped (briefly), threatened by an ex-marine, and lost his hero worship for the dazzling Pete Marks, a high diver. Compelling book.

Books about handicapped people, when of top quality, turn out to be books about people we recognize as one of *us*. Which is, of course, the whole point. Handicapped people are impaired—certainly. But these books show that those of us who fail to see the far greater number of shared characteristics—hope, fear, humor, love, need for respect—are the truly and hopelessly blind.

### CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

The spring 1983 issue of *Virginia English Bulletin* will have as its focus "Literature Still Worth Reading." Manuscripts, not to exceed 5-8 pages, should be sent to the editor. Authors are encouraged to address a specific work (classics, contemporary classics, literature for adolescents or for children): Why is the book still worth reading? What are successful ways to use the book in the classroom? Why do students respond to this book?

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 1, 1983

## Great English Teaching Ideas: Teaching Exceptional Students

JUDY SELF, *Guest Editor*

For most of us, about half of our students each year are exceptional—students below or above the average skill development for their grade level. Teaching these students in homogeneous groups is difficult enough because every year each group seems to need different pacing and different supplementary materials and instruction. Most of us find students from both ends of the spectrum in *every* class we teach. The major problem we tackle each day is finding materials that challenge our gifted students, yet are relevant to our slower learners.

Exceptional students from both sides of average are the first to "tune us out"; they become quickly bored with materials designed for average students. This boredom is really normal human behavior. Like slower students, we may also excuse ourselves from reading an involved, detailed discussion of a subject if we don't understand it; our lack of understanding makes it uninteresting and we'd rather do something else. Like gifted students, we may never want to do the same crossword puzzle twice; all the excitement and challenge is gone once we understand the solution. Thus, while the causes of exceptional students' boredom are different, the boredom's result is often the same: students may be disruptive as they seek other stimulation—their excuse to themselves, to their peers, and to us for not participating in class activities.

This column contains ideas to engage exceptional students' attention. Together, the ideas cover language arts: writing, reading, speaking, and research. Some of the following ideas are best adapted for gifted students; several are best for basic students; however, most are versatile enough to offer both enrichment and success in heterogeneous classes.

*Judy Self is a teacher at Christiansburg Middle School and current secretary of VATE. When she organized this column, she was the middle school member-at-large to the VATE Executive Board. Her column presents ideas from six junior high/middle/intermediate school teachers.*

**SPELLING: "THE POT"*****Skills, Tests, Practice, Writing***

Too often students memorize spelling lists just for the weekly spelling test; a fact displayed by performance on unit spelling tests. "The Pot" is ideal to give students regular practice with their spelling words and more responsibility for remembering the lists over a long period of time. "The Pot" is a large container in which the week's list is placed, each word on a separate card.

Activities using "The Pot:"

- Toward the end of each spelling test, draw 5-10 review words from "The Pot." Students don't know which words in advance will be drawn and will thus be responsible for previous lists.
- Draw 25 words from the container; have students write the words in alphabetical order.
- Draw seven or eight words from the container and have students use these words in a story in the order in which they were drawn.
- As a review before a test, have a spelling bee. Draw the words from "The Pot."
- Have students write definitions for the words that they draw from "The Pot."
- When students have extra time in class, several of them can use the time to review spelling words by drawing words and asking the others to spell.

*Cheri L. Burton, Glenvar Junior High, Roanoke, VA*

**LITERATURE: "WHAT'S IN A NAME?"*****Reading, Writing, Analyzing***

This activity uses descriptive language, discusses stereotypes, and makes students aware of the power of names and labels. Students are first asked to paraphrase the "What's in a Name" speech from *Romeo and Juliet*, and to agree or disagree with its premise. In a discussion, the point may be made that although a name cannot really change the nature of an object, it may influence our perceptions of a thing or person. To show that we really do form impressions just from names, place students in groups of three and ask them to write a character sketch of one of the following: Pickles Devine; Reginald Q. Snodgrass, III; Harold Schwartzenburger; or Camellia Sue Sweetbriar. Students might then be asked to write, individually, an interior monolog appropriate for their character.

Discussion following collection of these papers will probably show that students are more aware of the importance of names and labels; they can then be led into a more sophisticated analysis of persuasive and loaded language or into a discussion of type, round and flat characters. An additional enrichment activity for this unit would be the playing of a Bill Crosby recording, such as *200 MPH*, and having students list all of the stereotypes of which Cosby makes use. A discussion similar to the one above could then follow.

*Lois T. Stover, Plaza Junior High School, Va. Beach, VA*

## VALUES AND TRADITIONS: "INVENT A HOLIDAY"

### *Reading, Writing, Speaking*

"Invent a Holiday" is a ten day project that helps students understand what traditions and values are and how they reflect societies and individuals. The project consists of a report which contains a rationale stating why the holiday is being proposed and how and when it is to be celebrated; symbols and their meanings (colors, animals or personages, food, flowers, jewelry); a greeting card with illustrations and a verse; and a song, the words of which are to be original, although the tune may be borrowed. On the day oral presentations begin, every student is given an evaluation sheet with each person's name. Criteria used to judge each others' oral presentation—creativity of thought, originality of expression, and effectiveness of delivery—is discussed. After each presentation, students rate the performance on a scale of 1-3 (1—unsatisfactory; 2—satisfactory; 3—excellent). Additionally, a written version is given to the teacher for evaluation of language use.

Topics have ranged from "Be Kind to Students Day" to "Braces Day." Especially popular this year were "Preppie Day," "Punk Day," and "Atari Day." Foods have included a cake decorated like a soccer ball and cookies shaped and colored to resemble flying saucers. Some of the songs are worthy of publication. For instance:

UP ON THE HOUSETOP  
SADDLEBREDS PAUSE,  
OUT COMES AN IZOD,  
HEAR THE APPLAUSE.  
ON TO OUR BODIES,  
LOTS OF JOYS,  
ALL FOR THE GOOD LITTLE  
GIRLS AND BOYS.

PREP, PREP, PREP,  
WHO WOULDN'T LET  
THE GREAT ALLIGATOR  
DRESS THEM UP RIGHT  
TO LOOK LIKE PREPPIE,  
ALL DAY AND NIGHT

—Mike Aaglan

My students have learned that their holidays have revealed much about them—their hopes, beliefs, and interests. They have begun to apply this knowledge to obtain better understanding of the literary selections we study.

*Barbara B. Hull, Princess Anne Junior High, Virginia Beach, VA*

## WORD ORIGINS: "THE MELTING POT"

### *Research, Descriptive Writing*

Writing a menu for a restaurant featuring international foods introduces students to words borrowed from other languages. They also gain practice using descriptive language and sensory images. Including an advertisement to be printed on the backs of their menus provides students with practice in creating a mood in writing.

- Discuss the origins of such words as *pizza*, *tacos*, and *spaghetti*, the groups responsible for bringing these words to America, and why such words have been added to our language.
- Have students find the word origins and meanings of such words as *sauerkraut*, *frankfurter*, *chili*, *eclair*, *crueller*, *goulash*, *gumbo*, *borscht*, *cookie*, *antipasto*, *frappe*, *mousse*, *bouillon*, *creole*, *ravioli*, *broccoli*, *tortilla*, *bagel*, *croutons*, *chow mein*, *puree*, *sauteed*.
- Show students a menu which includes descriptions for each dish. Have them discuss the type of language used.
- Discuss the atmosphere of different types of restaurants and television commercials for these restaurants which students may have seen. Ask students what words suggest a restaurant that is family oriented, elegant, quaint.
- Allow two class periods for students to discuss and write menus. An ad which creates a particular mood should be included on the back of the menu. If possible, provide unlined paper to be folded and used for the final copy.
- Allow time for students to read and respond to each others' menus.

*Carolyn M. Hinson, Dublin Middle School, Dublin, VA*

## BASIC ENGLISH UNIT PLANNING

### *Reading, Writing, Life Skills*

Instead of the textbook, plan units around:

|                       |                                |              |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| telephone directories | checking and savings account   | catalogs     |
| sales contracts       | information                    | newspapers   |
| credit applications   | bus and train schedules        | TV guides    |
| travel brochures      | store and office directories   | travel maps  |
| service contracts     | voter registration information | office memos |
| job applications      | safety and first aid materials | pamphlets    |
|                       | drivers' manuals               |              |

If your students are lacking basic writing skills, plan units on:

|                           |                                        |                    |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------|
| making a schedule         | ordering events chronologically        | outlining          |
| writing complete messages | ordering events in order of importance | paraphrasing       |
| writing business letters  | organizing and writing directions      | sentence combining |
| organizing a chart        | filling out job applications           | order forms        |
| describing items          | supporting opinions with facts         | telephoning        |

*Leslie A. Kent, Herndon Intermediate, Herndon, VA*

## POETRY: "EVERYONE CAN BE A POET"

### *Writing, Reading Appreciation*

Many students have a negative attitude toward poetry study. This activity has students write poetry first, thus increasing their appreciation of it. Distribute and discuss a worksheet which explains and shows how to write five kinds of formula poems: the noun poem, the cinquain, the name poem, the limerick, and the haiku are good formula poems to use initially. Then, have students write the assigned poems and a non-formula poem. Students could also write the definitions to simile, metaphor, other poetic terms that they will later meet in literature study. Students are given a deadline by which they must submit this poetry project to the teacher to be checked.

Students should spend a class period sharing, analyzing, and enjoying what has been written: counting syllables, commenting on the appropriateness of the subject matter to the form, determining if the cinquains follow the formula and if the adjectives in the noun poems are appropriate to the selected noun. They laugh at the limericks and visualize the similes and metaphors.

Each student then selects three or four poems to be published in a booklet and copies each of these poems on a separate sheet of paper. All the poems are then arranged by category and given to a typist, perhaps a volunteer parent. Several students turn in cover designs, and the classes vote on which one should be used. The booklet is copied on the school photocopy machine, collated by students after school, and distributed to each student who participated in the project. Students display great pride in their work and in being published. Finally, the class reads and listens to poems by well-known poets. Students by now have a greater appreciation for the craft of poetry and are more receptive to studying it because they are poets, too.

*Joan D. McDermott, Joyce Kilmer Intermediate, Vienna, VA*

## CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

The winter 1983 issue of *Virginia English Bulletin* will include manuscripts on "Computers in English Classes." Authors are encouraged to submit manuscripts, not to exceed 5-8 pages, which address the importance of computer literacy, how computers may aid the English/language arts teacher, capitalizing on student interest in computers, comparisons of the microcomputer with the interactive computer, developing computer programs for English classes. The manuscripts should be written to an audience knowing little about computers, but desiring information and understanding. Manuscripts which move beyond skill development will be appreciated; it is permissible, however, to address development of student language arts skills.

DEADLINE: OCTOBER 1, 1983

## The Writer's Journal: Reducing Writing Anxiety

PAMELA GAY

WRITER 1: *"Seeing myself as a writer is really a joke. The best way I could see myself as a writer is to be an author of a book called How Not to Write."*

WRITER 2: *"Sometimes I become impatient when I am writing, wanting everything to be perfect and when I realize that it is so imperfect, I sometimes give up."*

WRITER 3: *"I fear my grades on papers and usually freeze up on an important writing. The word 'grade' gets me every time."*

WRITER 4: *"I am afraid that what I want to say is wrong, so I attempt something of a fake writing."*

WRITER 5: *"I get an idea in my head and when I begin to write, my mind goes blank."*

WRITER 6: *"I am very scared of writing. I feel stupid that I got through high school without learning to write properly."*

These are the voices of six unskilled college freshman writers. To these frustrated writers, writing appears easy for everyone but themselves. They sometimes conclude that they cannot learn to write, that writing ability is inherent, not acquired. As a result of their erroneous beliefs about writing, they often become so anxious that this anxiety interferes with their writing performances. By emphasizing process rather than product, teachers can help demystify writing for these students. One way to do so is to ask students to keep a writer's journal.

The writer's journal raises the student consciousness of SELF as writer by asking a series of questions to help the student think more about the writing process. In a writer's journal, students write to the teacher about writing, and the teacher responds, usually to the individual, thus engaging in dialogue, or sometimes to the group, encouraging discussion of common concerns about writing.

The writer's journal might include, among others, the following questions:

WJ1: How do you see yourself as a writer?

WJ2: What are your recollections of how you learned to write?

WJ3: What problems did you encounter in writing?

*Pamela Gay teaches in the Writing Center at Old Dominion University and is the new state coordinator of NCTE's Achievement Awards in Writing Program.*

WJ4: How do you feel about your writing performance?

WJ5: How would you describe your writing process?

WJ6: You have learned about two techniques which can be used to get started in writing: listing and freewriting. What do you think of these techniques? Do you prefer one or the other or a combination, or have you come up with your own method? Do you always use the same method?

Journal writing, though required, is not graded. Entries are made throughout the course. Students might use looseleaf notebook paper for journal entries so that the entries can be inserted into the collection, allowing the students to look back and plan ahead.

The quotations at the opening of this article are excerpts from WJ1 (How do you see yourself as a writer?). Excerpts, names withheld, may be distributed to students to be read aloud in class: hearing the voices of peer writers makes students feel less alienated.

As evident in the following responses to WJ2, the causes of negative attitude toward writing are partially linked to a student's experience with school writing, perhaps going as far back as elementary school and following the student through college.

#### WJ2 (Recollections of How I Learned to Write)

WRITER 1: *"My first writing experience that I remember was one that I had in my tenth grade exccelerated English course. As usual I was given a dull topic to write about which was high school. Immediately I panic when I heard my instructor say this. For one thing I heard my instructor was so hard that she would automatically give you an 'F' if you had one mechanical error. I was heart broken, mechanics in writing was my worst point. Well the night before it was due. I was so scared of what my grade would be that I really didn't give the topic much thought. As the night went on I told myself to imagine, imagine, but I couldn't. I have one of the dullest imaginations in the world. I finally wrote a paper and when I received my grade and my final copy back I was horrified. It was written all over and said 'See me after class.' I was scared to death."*

WRITER 2: *"As I entered junior high school people would be punished for misbehaving by having to write an essay of 500 words. If you didn't turn the essay in the next day, it was increased to 1000."*

WRITER 3: *"I cannot recall ever receiving a paper back without it looking like a battlefield of red pens, but I always believed that the fault did not lie entirely with me. Many a boring English class I found myself blaming the teacher for doing a poor job of conducting the class."*

Developing writers, especially those placed in a basic writing course, often feel confused and angry about their writing problems. They wonder what went wrong. It is helpful for them, as they get ready to set goals for themselves as writers, to reflect on their past experiences with writing. When a teacher asks students, particularly those who do not like to

write, to not only write but also to write about writing, the students may feel hostile at first. A positive personal written response by the teacher, however, encourages a positive attitude toward writing and helps establish a trusting relationship between teacher and student:

### WJ3 (Problems I Encountered in Writing)

WRITER 1: *"The problems I encountered while writing this paper were many. One of the greatest problems I have is expression or choice of words. The next problem is coherence. I simply don't know how to develop a point."*

TEACHER RESPONSE: *"Kevin, I could certainly identify with your feelings of anger, having been very angry with an old car myself. But is it that you don't know how to develop a point or that you haven't yet come to a point you want to develop?"*

WRITER 2: *"Most of all I learned that many times I try and guess what the reader wants; by this I mean the words which will best capture the reader's senses."*

TEACHER RESPONSE: *"Raymond, how wise you are to worry about the reader! It's time to stop guessing. Who is your reader?"*

These entries are helpful to the teacher as well, for often what the teacher sees as a writer's problems or concerns may be quite different from what the writer sees. Beliefs about writing can interfere with learning to write and constitute one possible cause in the formation of a negative attitude toward writing. Many unskilled writers believe that skilled writers do not have problems writing, that they write easily and fluently. This belief causes some unskilled writers to feel that they are different, that they are the only ones for whom writing is a struggle. A student's beliefs about writing may interfere with learning to write.

The teacher, in asking all students to write about problems in writing, is assuming that all students have problems to write about. This assumption alone helps reduce anxiety for those writers who feel writing is easy for everyone else. They learn that all writers struggle. Also, asking students to observe other writers' writing processes and to describe their own processes helps students see the writing process as recursive and varying not only from writer to writer, but even for one writer, from task to task.

Most unskilled writers, because they fear evaluation of their own writing, do not feel that they can help anyone else with writing. Early in the course, one student wrote: "I think exchanging papers is stupid. A dummy telling another dummy what's wrong. The teacher should do it." At the end of the course, after developing editing skills, the same writer wrote: "Having our papers edited by other students and also gaining the experience of editing other people's papers has been very helpful." Asking this question at several points in the course is a valuable

aid to the teacher in assessing a writer's attitude and in planning future editing activities.

The writer's journal helps students see themselves as developing writers and encourages them to act on that awareness by becoming involved in the growth process. With new perceptions of writing and with the development of language skills also comes the development of a more positive attitude toward writing and the emergence of a new confidence, as evident in these responses to WJ1 (How do you see yourself as a writer?), written mid-course:

WRITER 1: *"I have learned that writing just doesn't require writing but also observing the things around you."*

WRITER 2: *"I have learned how to develop an essay from scratch to final copy."*

WRITER 3: *"My confidence is building and I find myself looking forward to this class."*

WRITER 4: *"As much as I hate to write period, I was surprised that I had the will to write a letter. I have even gotten to the point where I will write in my free time."*

The emphasis throughout the writer's journal is on the writer-person. In keeping this journal, students become more and more aware that "persons, rather than mechanisms," as Emig puts it in *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders* (NCTE, 1971), "compose." The feeling of progress, of growth as writers, helps destroy the myth that writing ability is inherent. Students learn that writing is a skill: anyone can learn to write.

## Basic Classes: Language Usage

CHRIS JAMES

The integration of reading, writing, and language usage into a basic class appears to be appropriate. For example, if language usage is being taught, then the application of these skills is significant when reading and writing are effectively incorporated. An effective method of accomplishing this teaching technique is to have students select and read articles from a magazine such as the *Reader's Digest* and write at least three-quarters of a page on each story describing the contents of the article. The primary objective is to have students apply the language skill to their writing.

Back issues of the *Reader's Digest* or another suitable magazine are not that difficult to obtain. For instance, students and school librarians are often willing to donate enough copies to make up a class set. The variety of stories contained in the non-current issues give the students an opportunity to select articles of special interest to them.

The integration of language usage with reading and writing may take place by designating a special magazine report day after each skill has been taught. This method of integration has eliminated the boredom of learning language usage through the continual use of skill rule and exercise drills. The students benefit when a subject taught becomes more interesting and meaningful.

*Chris James teaches composition, language usage, and American literature at Deep Creek High in Chesapeake.*

### **CFC Publishes Revised Edition of *Teaching Exceptional Children in All America's Schools***

Based on extensive, first hand experiences, the authors, Maynard C. Reynolds and Jack W. Birch, suggest approaches that can be readily adapted to meet the required role changes for regular teachers and other professional personnel. Many of the unique features of the first edition are maintained. Checklists are provided at the end of each chapter. Marginal notations on every page are designed to aid use. ISBN 0-86586-122-6; single copy, \$19.95. Contact Council for Exceptional Children, Publications Sales, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091

## Writing for Publication: The Query Letter

MOIRA SHINE

Writing for publication is one way to communicate with others and to expand knowledge in any discipline. University faculty are expected to publish and the assumption is made that they have both knowledge of their discipline and the ability to write. For publication in professional journals, authors need to write about a subject for a very specific audience in a way that will be acceptable to a publisher or an editorial board. To facilitate this writing process, the use of a query letter is suggested as a way to communicate with an editor. (Some editors respond to query letters, some do not.) The following exercise describes how writers use the query letter in preparing an article for submission to a professional journal.

1. *Preparation.* Consider the following before writing the query letter: Brainstorm for ideas you would like to write about; investigate journals that accept manuscripts on the topic you have chosen; understand the type of readers you would like to reach (audience); focus your ideas to reach the audience you envision in the format of the journal in which you hope to publish.

2. *Writing the letter.* When this point is reached, draft a query letter. This is a letter of inquiry to an editor and includes: A brief summary of your proposed topic; a rationale for why your article needs to be written; a judgement of how your article will differ from what is presently written on the topic; the credentials that make it appropriate for you to be the person to write this article.

Writing a query letter to an editor has the effect of forcing the writer to a focus that can be communicated to others. It may also result in response as to whether it is worthwhile to develop this article for the audience of that journal. A response to a query letter indicates (1) no interest in the topic at this point, (2) possible interest in the topic with some suggested modifications, or (3) high interest. A query letter answer is NOT a commitment to publish and subsequent rejection of your manuscript is a distinct possibility. However, writing such a letter does decrease the possibility that you will waste time on a topic that is not acceptable by a selected journal and allows you to choose another audience.

3. *Feedback from friends* (who are knowledgeable and honest!). When you have written your query letter, ask a trusted friend or colleague to read it and respond based on the following criteria: Is the purpose of your proposed article clear? Is the importance of the article supported? Does the proposed article offer an original treatment of the topic? Are

*Moiria Shine is an associate professor of nursing at George Mason University.*

your qualifications to author this article appropriate?

The person serving as pseudo-editor need not be an expert in your area or topic. Someone who is unfamiliar with the topic may be a more objective judge of the clarity of your topic delineation.

4. *Revision and risk.* Take the feedback from your chosen pseudo-editor, critique it as objectively as possible, and then prepare to rewrite a real query letter to an editor and wait for that important answer that may help you discern where to put your writing efforts.

## REVIEWS

Hevener, Filmer, Jr. *Successful Student Teaching: A Handbook for Elementary and Secondary Student Teachers*. Century 21 Publishing, P. O. Box 8, Saratoga, California 95070, 1981, \$8.95. Reviewed by Michael D. Davis.

Hevener has packed considerable information into this relatively short book. The work is easily readable and presents a number of sound suggestions for student teachers. The strength of the book is in two chapters that deal with the heart of the student teaching experience: Chapter Seven, "Relating to the Supervising Teacher" (classroom cooperating teacher), and Chapter Eight, "Relating to the College Student Teaching Counselor" (University Supervisor). Hevener offers practical suggestions for working with these significant people to establish a positive professional relationship. Increased emphasis on these two sections would be a welcome addition in any future edition of this book.

One weakness of the book is that much of the information is presented as if it is applicable to all student teachers when it is actually university or college specific. For example, applications for student teaching, use of screening committees, and grade point requirements are determined by each institution. School policy dictates acceptable procedures for working with parents and rarely can student teachers strike out on their own in this area. Some of the suggestions are pragmatic but may not always be realistic. The idea that student teachers should not work during student teaching is laudable, but the reality for many students is that they must work to survive. Urban students with family responsibilities can't relocate to do student teaching and suggesting that they should is unreasonable.

Student teaching is the culminating activity in most teacher education programs and many of the topics presented by the author belong in the courses and experiences leading up to the student teaching semester. If students aren't well versed in the skills, knowledge, and attitudes presented by Hevener, it is doubtful they could learn them during eight to ten weeks of student teaching. This handbook may be particularly appropriate during a pre-student teaching practicum experience or seminar where methods are reviewed and policies learned. The bibliography, appendices, and suggested readings make it a particularly useful review tool during student teaching.

*Michael D. Davis is an assistant professor of early childhood education and coordinator of student teaching for the Division of Teacher Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.*

*Women's Studies*. Scholastic Book Services, New York. Reviewed by Angela S. Pickels.

Women's liberation. Women in the workforce. Changes in the traditional family. Newer life options and alternatives. These themes echo familiarly from news headlines and talk shows. They also reverberate in this fifteen book series which spans readability from seventh grade to twelfth grade. Including essays, plays, short stories, novels and biographies, this series has the potential of fitting into the classroom in a myriad of ways. As a supplement to already existing units, these books would be invaluable. A unit study of manners and morality, for instance, could easily contain *Pride and Prejudice* by Austen, *Far From the Madding Crowd* by Hardy, and *Jane Eyre* by Bronte. These books offer insight into the progression of women from control by a rigid moral code to a less restrictive one.

Another delightful offering in this series is the Shakespearean selections. "A Mid-summer Night's Dream" is offered in a simplified adaptation as an introduction to the stories of the author. *Four Comedies* includes "A Mid-summer Night's Dream", "As You Like It", "The Tempest", and "Twelfth Night". Printed in their entirety with an introduction and glossary, these plays are a fine example of Shakespeare's humor.

To *Sir, With Love* by Braithwaite, *The Member of the Wedding* by McCullers, and *True Grit* by Portis explore problems of growing up. Each book explores choices the character must make and the consequences these decisions entail. In a more psychological vein, Henry James explores the confusion of growing up in *The Turn of the Screw*. Who is innocent? Who is lying? Are there apparitions or are they the imagination of children crying out to be noticed? Two other books included on the theme of growing up are *I Am Fifteen* and *I Don't Want to Die* by Arnothy and *Cabaret*. Both works examine the difficulties of becoming a woman during the oppression of Nazi Germany. Arnothy's book is taken from diaries she wrote during the siege of Budapest. *Cabaret* would be better for the older reader since some experience is needed to understand the psychological motivations and effects on Sally, the main character.

Even though all of us at times have wished to find that secret world of Shangri-la, Hilton's *Lost Horizon* would better fit a fantasy unit than one on women. *The Sandy Duncan Story*, however, is a moving personal story of a celebrity. I did find it insipid and could think of other women I would prefer to have my students read about. The remaining two books are on family life. Their inclusion in the series is important because the family does shape and define a large portion of one's life. *The Homecoming* by Hamner and *An American Family*, a television series script, are excellent choices portraying diversity of family experiences. A key to this series lies in the creativity of the teacher. Each book has the potential for interest and controversy which could lead to writing and oral lessons. Male readers may be difficult to interest in several of the books, but female readers are provided an array of different female characters to examine.

Angie Pickels is an English teacher at Manchester High School in Chesterfield County and has been a popular presenter at VATE programs.

Reference (Grades 7-12), Scholastic Book Services: New York. Reviewed by Alan M. McLeod

*The Teacher's Shelf: Grades 7-9 Readers' Choice Book Bag; Grades 10-12 Readers' Choice Book Bag*, Scholastic Book Services, New York. Reviewed by Judy Richardson

Stimulation to read from an enticing potpourri of titles is the intent of these two series. For a reasonable price, a teacher can stock the room with a collection of twenty books which may meet the needs of the "in-betweeners: finished my homework; forgot my book; nothing to do." The selection of titles reflects sensitivity to adolescent interests, range of reading levels, variety of genre.

The Readers' Choice Book Bag for grades 7-9 offers books ranging from about fifth to eleventh grade readability. Topics covered appeal to the younger adolescent's preferences for teenage protagonists who are growing up facing challenges and adventures. Titles must have been selected for specific appeal to girls (*Summer of the Sky Blue Bikini*) or to boys (*Basketball's Big Men*), although some are geared to both sexes (*Mama's Bank Account*). Most of the books are fairly short; some contain a series of short selections, such as *Unbelievable But True* which gives facts in one to two lines. The books seem relatively "safe" from censorship; parents are portrayed realistically but not unfavorably; subtle messages about responsibilities of growing up and finding oneself are written within exciting plots, as in *A Chill in the Lane*. The selections could stimulate reluctant readers by hooking them, as with *The World's Greatest Athlete* which has been on television recently. Selections can accommodate the needs of corrective readers. A few classics—*Dracula*, *Heroes and Monsters of Greek Myths*, and *11 Great Horror Stories* will provide challenging reading. This Book Bag can get a class started; the teacher should not expect it to meet more advanced interests.

The Readers' Choice Book Bag for grades 10-12 offers books ranging from seventh to thirteenth grades, with one very easy book, *Call the Cops*. They are definitely geared to an older adolescent's maturing tastes and to developing literary depth; for example, Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* is included along with *Return of the Native*. Available are several novels about growing up—*Ring On My Finger*, and sports—*Ski Bum*, and easier to read selections—*Nashville*. There is in this Book Bag more choice, reflecting the older adolescent's concern with facing oneself during crisis—*Love is a Blanket Word*, and need for sophisticated heroes—*The Assassination of John and Robert Kennedy* and *Bylines*, as well as their interest in science fiction—*The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *Nine Strange Stories* and *A Journey to the Center of the Earth*. More classic literature is included: *The Scarlet Letter* and *Hound of the Baskervilles*. A balance of fiction and non-fiction has been maintained. Few books are included with appeal specifically to male or female readers; the appeal is made to readers seeking to define interests, genre, and need for material which challenges thought and produces reflection as well as enjoyment.

The Book Bag for grades 10-12 is the better buy for a developmental group of readers, with six to eight selections for advanced readers included. The Book Bag for grades 7-9 is a good buy for a class of reluctant readers. They are both grab bags of interesting and varied selections.

Judy Richardson is an assistant professor of reading and adolescent literature at Virginia Commonwealth University. She contributed "Atoning for My Sins or What I Would Do If I Could Do It Over" to the Winter 1980 Bulletin.

Scholastic has collected a series of varied and interesting references affordable for many classrooms. While the collection can be used for grades 7-12, it would appear to be most appropriate, with a few exceptions, for grades 7-9. Among the more interesting books is *Demons, Monsters and Abodes of the Dead*. Originally published as *A Dictionary of Mythical Places*, the book's short entries are organized alphabetically. A book equally interesting and as easy to read is *Gods, Demigods & Demons: An Encyclopedia of Greek Mythology*.

Particularly useful for older students are *The A+ Guide to Good Writing* and the *Scholastic Dictionary of American English*. The former attends to aspects of the writing process and offers specific suggestions and practical writing advice. Other resources in this collection of 12 are the *Scholastic Dictionary of Synonyms, Antonyms, Homonyms*; a *World Atlas*; *Words Alive!* (which describes how certain phrases and words achieved their present meaning); *What's In a Name?* (Origins of many first and last names of people); *How to Use a Thesaurus*; *Dic-tion-ar-y Skilz*; *A Guide for Better Reading for Parents and Children*; *The Hammond Almanac of a Million Facts, Records, Forecasts*. Only the reading guide appears inappropriate for the targeted grade levels; the remaining items would prove useful to many students as part of a classroom collection.

## Bar Charts and the Idea of Relevance: A Classroom Technique

GLENN BROADHEAD

In writing, why *do* some ideas fall into a particular line of thought while others *do not*? To show what is involved in establishing relevance, I use the following technique. Each student first reads a group of sentences, decides which ones are relevant to a given topic, and reports his or her responses. These responses are used to construct a bar chart which is written on the blackboard or projected on a screen. The bar chart illustrates patterns ranging from total agreement to total disagreement about the various sentences. Students are guided to seek and articulate reasons for believing a given sentence to be relevant or irrelevant.

The teacher's first step is to compile a group of relevant and irrelevant sentences—most easily done by finding a paragraph on a topic of interest to the class, jumbling the sentences out of order, and adding a few new, irrelevant sentences. The model I use is an exercise in an excellent but out-of-print textbook, Bryon Guyer and Donald A. Bird's *Patterns of Thinking and Writing* (San Francisco: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1959), pp. 23-24. Starting with a paragraph from an essay by C. Harley Grattan, "The Trouble with Books Today," Guyer and Bird made up the following exercise (in which the directions and a few of the sentences have been slightly altered, and sentence 16 added):

1. Best sellers bring spectacular money to a few writers. 2. Figures are hard to come by showing how many writers are successful in earning a living



The third step is to discuss the results shown on the bar chart. To see what kinds of observations and distinctions ought to be sought in the discussion, I compare the sample bar graph with the sentences in the Guyer and Bird exercise. To encourage students to state and argue their reasons for including or excluding a particular sentence, I begin by discussing the sentence(s) on which students are most wholly in agreement as to irrelevance. In the case of the Guyer and Bird exercise, as the bar chart shows, students are nearly unanimous in thinking statements 3 and 4 to be irrelevant. Students generally justify their decision to exclude statements 3 and 4 on the grounds that "prosperity" is not the same thing as "earning a living" (which implies adequacy rather than wealth). Many students naturally employ the method of *defining key terms* in order to determine relevance, and I acknowledge this useful procedure. I then state that, if the topic is presented as a question, the student has a good test for relevance: it is generally clear that an irrelevant statement is "not an answer" to the question.

Another group of statements easily identified by a majority of students as irrelevant is comprised of statements 6, 13, and 14. This 6-13-14 group illustrates the difference between statements that are "relevant" and those that are merely "related." The ideas in statements 13 and 14, for example, might be considered causes of writers' difficulty making a living, but they are not answers to the question, "Is it difficult?" Instead, they reply to the related question, "Why is it difficult?" Occasionally a student will wish to exclude one or all of the 6-13-14 group because they stereotype writers as being "temperamental." But this is a different issue than relevance, and I make the distinction clear: even though biased or wrong, the three statements *would* constitute answers to a question about causes, which a writer might wish to develop in a subsequent paragraph. The idea that a "line of thought" in an essay consists of a series of related questions to be answered is worth discussing in class; but the point here is to distinguish "relevance" from "relatedness," "truth" or "fairness."

It is usually convenient to discuss next the group comprised of statements 1, 5, 8, and 17, which point up three important distinctions. First, students rarely agree about these statements. Interestingly, a single student may be inconsistent in responding to this group. Statement 1, for instance, invariably receives fewer irrelevance "votes" than 5, 8, or 17. Examination of the statements shows that some students respond to the signal word "few" in statement 1; the other statements in this group have no such explicit signal, even though "fewness" is implicit. Thus, the distinction between relevance and *signals* of relevance may be drawn by comparing the bar chart's patterns with the statements in the exercise.

But the question still remains: should 1, 5, 8, and 17 be included or excluded? The answer depends upon one's estimate of the effectiveness of

laying one's cards on the table or else suppressing contrary evidence; that is, it illustrates a second distinction: the difference between relevance (logic) and persuasiveness (a rhetorical or moral choice). If this group of statements *is* to be included, I note, the question of placement or emphasis arises: where should they appear in the paragraph? Most students agree that it would be wise to include this group of statements early in the paragraph, as part of a statement of concession or qualification: "Although a few writers make spectacular money from best sellers, book clubs, mass circulation magazines, and movie rights, it is difficult to earn a living solely by writing." I remind them that digression to questions of paragraph organization should not be discouraged; the main point, however, is the issue of relevance itself.

A final group consists of statements 2, 12, and 16, which a few students sometimes find objectionable on grounds of redundancy. Again, redundancy is a different matter than irrelevance, and these statements all help answer the main question either directly or indirectly. And here the classroom discussion ends because little but embarrassment can be achieved by asking one student why he or she thinks sentence 10 is irrelevant, for example. Rather than dwell on obvious mistakes, I ask students to use the relevant sentences to write a finished paragraph.

When I prepare similar exercises on material designed to interest particular classes, I include up to six types of "distractor" sentences in order to make clear what relevance is and isn't: 1) distractors that are irrelevant by definition; 2) those that are irrelevant but related; 3) those that are wrong but relevant; 4) those that are relevant but contrary or damaging to the writer's claim; 5) those that are relevant but redundant; and 6) those that are relevant but inexplicitly or indirectly so.

*Glenn Broadhead is visiting assistant professor of rhetoric at Hampden-Sydney College.*

## **The Wicked Witch of Writing**

MARSHA OWENS HUBBARD

My eyes are blurry and my mind a glob of reddish pulp. The same questions keep nagging me, but I have no answers: "If these kids are so 'talented and gifted,' why is their writing often trite and grievous unto me? If I can't find a single run-on sentence or misspelled word to circle, why do I want to give the paper an *F*? What does it all matter anyway? These are bright kids who will 'make it,' with or without writing instruction, so who cares?" Well, that's a cop-out attitude for we know that writing involves more than spelling and punctuation. Exhausted, but

determined nevertheless, I told myself there must be some answers. But still, the answers did not come easily.

The blurry eyes are the result of hours of reading such articles as "Helping Inexperienced Writers," "Talking About Writing," "The Teacher Learns to Write"; and the mind-wrenching, bell-clanging confusion results from a multiplicity of ideas gleaned from the reading and twelve years of teaching experience that enlighten and derange all at once. I have struggled desperately to grab hold to Writing, but it is like catching the elusive butterfly. So I decided to turn all this chaos into what might be a practical and useful plan for me as a teacher, or "My Personal Vendetta Against the Wicked Witch of Writing."

The plan is divided into Recurring Principles of Writing Instruction and Strategies for Experiencing Writing. Experts agree some of the time and convince some of us about writing theory and practice. But all of the experts do not agree all of the time; there are different concepts concerning the many complexities of writing:

- *The writing experience should be frequent and consistent. The important thing does not seem to be what is written, but how often writing occurs. It is a process which requires great discipline, and perhaps the only thing we can do freely without assessing the "proper" time and place. Young people need scheduled blocks of time in which to write so that it becomes a regular routine. Moreover, the student who has been "tagged" has often been sold a bill of goods about the Muse and tends to balk at the slightest hint of rigidity. This student, perhaps more than others, needs to learn the value of consistency in writing.*
- *Writing should be positively evaluated, not negatively criticized. Teachers must remember how personal a student's writing is. Work can be evaluated; suggestions can be given for improvement; and assistance can be given for revision. But the work itself should not be devalued because that is, in effect, devaluing the writer. I heard of a teacher once who told his students candidly that he disliked grading papers, but that he liked to read their writing. This seems like a marvelous device to get more for less; do not try to grade everything.*
- *Reading must be an integral part of the writing process. Only through exposure to the written word can a person write the word. Pedantic instruction need not be given in elements of style, intricate phraseology, or subtle nuances of expression. But a familiarity with the great and not-so-great authors will have an effect on writing to some degree. Even the brightest students may be unaware of the effect, but experts are generally in agreement that reading almost magically enhances one's language capabilities.*

The second part of the plan in attacking "the Witch" is the explanation of possible strategies. These are designed primarily for the advanced ninth grade student, but certainly could be adapted to other grades. I would create three perimeters within which to work. The perimeters can be thought of as forming a triangle. One corner of the triangle is composed of *editing teams*. Within each self-contained classroom, the students are divided into teams who work together to edit each other's papers. Any or all of the team members may read and edit papers of other team

members before the papers are handed in for teacher evaluation. A running tally is kept of team errors in specified categories for a designated period of time (such as one six weeks). Ninth graders usually respond to games and rewards, so the team with the least number of errors at the end of the time wins a "prize" for their efforts. This procedure makes use of peer editing and appeals to the competitive spirit of many students. On the other hand, those who may not be motivated by competition still have the built-in advantage of turning in "perfect" papers.

Before the teams get to work, the teacher should *decide which mechanical errors will take priority* (a second corner of the triangle), and these should be kept at a minimum. For the advanced student, I decided to focus on sentence variety, the appropriate use of transitional devices, and parallelism. Any other errors made by the students would be noted, but would not be counted against them.

The third point of the triangle allows for *outgrowth possibilities* generated at any time during the writing experience. For example, I capitalized on media coverage at the time of the hostages' return from Iran. We spent several class periods reading newspapers and magazine accounts and, as an appropriate follow-up, students wrote letters to the editor and to their congressman.

Once these guidelines have been established and fully understood by all participants, the teacher can present writing opportunities for the students to experience. The starting point for writing should be personal inventories. These provide the students with a wealth of ideas, and usually motivate the most reluctant students for they can begin by writing about themselves. Most of this exercise results in writing in phrases.

The second experience is two-fold in purpose for it provides the students with a feeling of superiority and control, and also practice in proofreading procedures. Make arrangements with a teacher of a lower grade for those younger students to write papers for the older students to "grade." Undoubtedly, the older students' pseudo-sophistication will spot the lack of sophistication in the "little kids'" writing, and they will be more apt to notice mechanical errors as well.

An unnatural spin-off from this experience is to move from working with the very young to the very old. Barbara B. Dreher (*English Journal*, Oct. 1980) advocates conducting writing programs for senior citizens in nursing homes and retirement communities. High school students could benefit greatly from sharing with these wonderfully resourceful people and write extensively on a wide range of ideas and topics from questionnaires, to letters, character sketches, histories. Probably the most valuable lesson would be insight and understanding that may otherwise not be tapped.

- *Students are always searching for whatever is relevant. Capitalize on any topics that are timely—i.e., drug abuse, boy/girl relationships, parental relationships, school events.*

- *Television is an ever-present companion for most students. Have them write their honest reactions to at least one show per week; they will watch many.*
- *A sense of audience is necessary for writing. Have them write something to be printed, either in the school newspaper, literary magazine, or local newspaper.*
- *Students would rather talk than write. Have them work in pairs—one records a story, personal experience, or idea told by the other. The entire communication process (or lack of) will unfold.*
- *Have some fun one day. Forbid any talking and require that all communication be written. This no doubt will be chaotic, but should point out the importance of clear writing in order to facilitate understanding on the part of the reader.*

Teachers who attempt to confront the Wicked Witch can draw ideas from the scarecrow's brain, strength from the lion's courage, and patience from the tin man's heart. But most of all we need Dorothy's resolve that things are never so bad as they may seem; and that perhaps "somewhere over the rainbow" a student or two or three may learn something about writing.

*Marsha Hubbard teaches at Stonewall Jackson Junior High in Hanover County.*

## Treating the "Dumb" Syndrome

KATHY SADLER

I am a relatively new teacher, and so I have been willing to try almost anything to motivate students. A secondary school English teacher did the same for me, and one result was an assignment intended to stimulate accuracy, creativity, and enthusiasm. Re-writing *Beowulf* in narrative prose with a modern setting was a creative challenge for me as a student. As a teacher, I have found the task also to be one in which students can create and become excited about their writing:

*It is the year 1980. In an attempt to find alternate fuel sources, a chemical called "Grenconoxide Delamonium," Grendel for short, has been developed. This chemical secretes a petroleum-like substance when "fed" matters containing chlorophyll. The one major precaution that has to be taken is to keep the chemical in a closed area. If the Grendel were released it would devour all the green plants on earth because there has been no chemical discovered that can destroy the Grendel.*

Another plus of this assignment came with the students' further understanding of the cultural aspects of an early society by viewing and writing of their own. The following excerpt is certainly a social comment:

*Hrothgar was a great and generous leader. He had many enthusiastic followers. To repay his fellow citizens for their loyalty, he decided to erect a*

huge monument that was very elaborate and to dedicate it to all Danish citizens. This monument was not an ordinary statue but a grand hall that could accommodate celebrations of every kind. It was located right next to the country's largest shopping mall so that supplies were never very far away.

One might notice the resemblance of the next sample to the story of Beowulf's reputation of bravery, his offer to help the Danes conquer Grendel, and the influence of Christianity on a pagan society:

*As time passed, it became more and more evident that young Wazi was a truly gifted athlete. In his schools, on the playgrounds of Kabul, and anywhere he went, the young lad was possessed with the spirit of competition—never losing a foot race, a jump, a discus throw, javelin toss, or even a swim meet.*

Feeling rather successful, I continued this mode into Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. I was hoping that my students could see and understand Chaucer's techniques and purposes in the characterization he presented in "The Prologue". By writing a modern prologue, they began to discover ways to be realistic, stereo-typical, and satirical. In this way, they could better appreciate the characters and lifestyles of the Middle Ages. Each student was assigned a different modern character who would be included on a pilgrimage to various shrines. Each was going in order to find "peace of mind". The following are some examples of the results. The host, Johnny Carson, begins:

*With November approaching, with rhetoric flying from the presidential campaigns, the voters grew weary. Their eyes were bleary with the boob tube images of a great Western hero riding his California elephant across the plains to the great Southern state of Virginia, getting ever closer to the great White House where an old farmer . . . clings to the great oval office refusing to debate with his co-campaigners.*

*. . . This was the mood of the country. They came from far and near, traveling to the city of Las Vegas to seek the rejuvenating heavenly money which helps them when they are sick. It just so happened that as the country faced its presidential choice, I was in New York at the Hilton Hotel, ready to "get loose" and go to Las Vegas. A motley crew of 19 people met by chance in the train station and all of them were taking the train to fame and hopefully fortune in the plastic classic monetary fairyland of Las Vegas.*

*I suggested in order to tame our excitement and insure a better train trip than Amtrak could ever hope to provide, that each person entertain in turn. When we returned to New York, the best entertainer would appear on the Tonight Show.*

*The person who stood out most was an actress. She removed a bouquet of roses from between her teeth and said, "My name is Kyra and I'm a Pisces." The actress entertained us by becoming a zucchini and eggplant casserole—a technique she had learned from her greatest admirer, Stanaslowsky. Her presentation went over well with the group—I think she said we gave her "good vibes"?*

Were the student writings all flawlessly written and extremely imaginative? Did everyone in the class learn and get excited about the literature? Has the "dumb" syndrome been completely cured? No, but this is the

beginning of an effective treatment plan. Who knows what they'll do with Swift's "A Modest Proposal"?

*Kathy Sadler teaches at Marymount School in Richmond.*

## **Writing for Real: An Enrichment Opportunity for the Gifted**

CHARLES R. SCHINDLER

Consider the advantages of mentorships as one way to simultaneously invite effective writing practice and take the sting out of teacher criticism. The writing assignment comes from a real need and the products will be shared with a real audience (mentor) beyond the school. Isn't that more inviting than a teacher selected assignment which will only be seen by the teacher? The critique, which can involve the teacher, the mentor or both, is not a paper being "marked" but a submittal being edited. In the role of junior level co-worker, the student makes a real contribution to some enterprise while polishing skills of various sorts, including writing.

One such mentorship program is being initiated at Thomas Harrison Junior High School in Harrisonburg with modest Federal funding administered through Special Programs for the Gifted of the Virginia Department of Education. THE TASK (Talent Advancing Specific Knowledge) Program allows seventh and eighth grade students to address and solve real-world problems in their areas of interest. This opportunity is a cooperative endeavor on a one-to-one basis between the student and a community person who acts as mentor. Students chosen to participate have demonstrated high levels of task commitment, creativity, and above average general ability. Mentors, adult experts, are drawn from the diverse range of occupations represented in the community. Once students identify their interests, they are paired with appropriate mentors. The mentor, student, and supervising teacher meet to establish expectations and obligations. Journal writing and seminar participation give students an opportunity to reflect upon their work and learning. The supervising teacher visits periodically to offer assistance. The student is expected to produce a tangible product as a result of this mentorship.

Participation is encouraged by these appeals:

### **STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES**

- *Enjoy the pleasure in helping expand your skills and knowledge*
- *Evaluate your potential for developing this interest*
- *Display what you produce with an audience*

- *Work in your interest area with a specialist*
- *Establish contacts for future employment*
- *Recognize and acquire specific skills*

#### MENTOR OPPORTUNITIES

- *Provide young talent educational experiences outside the regular curriculum*
- *Establish relationships with students and teachers in a learning situation*
- *Produce a useful product mutually accomplished*
- *Gain new insights into public education and its programs*
- *Share your specialty with a motivated learner*

The mentorships do not have a specific writing improvement intent; indeed, many of the mentorships over the life of the TASK Program may not involve job related writing at all (only the informal journal writing). But the possibilities to include "writing for real" are many. TASK Program supervising teachers generated over 100 ideas in a ten minute brainstorming session. The contexts are not specified but could be any number of settings in which students get to think, feel, and do as professionals or first hand inquirers. A list produced by Thomas Harrison teachers suggesting writing experiences that are something other than assigned classroom lessons may be obtained by writing the author.

No one expects these 7th and 8th grade gifted students to produce professional results without a lot of individual help by the mentors and the TASK supervising teachers. But the satisfaction of beginning, revising, and completing a high quality written product is a likely outcome for most TASK students.

*Charles Schindler is an assistant professor of secondary education and administration at the James Madison University.*

## **Less Testing, More Actual Reading and Writing Would Enhance Learning, NCTE Vice President Stephen Judy Says**

"A nationwide overemphasis on testing may be inhibiting children's growth in reading and writing." So says Stephen Judy of Michigan State University, who recently took office as vice president of the National Council of Teachers of English. If youngsters are to learn the first two Rs, they must engage in frequent reading and writing, with constructive response from teachers.

Yet many parents, administrators, and media reporters are preoccupied with scores on standardized tests, observes Judy, a teacher educator who will serve as NCTE president in 1984. "At all levels of education, testing is being used as a substitute for teaching. Testing creates the illusion that standards are being maintained and that something is being done about the problem of improving literacy. But little is being done over and above the testing. "For example," Judy notes, "state legislatures often mandate expensive testing programs but do not appropriate money to correct the problems identified through the testing.

"In most states in the union," Judy points out, "statewide assessment of pupils' skills has consumed millions of taxpayer dollars and succeeded only in eroding confidence in the public schools. A healthier and wiser use of those funds would be to help teachers learn some of the promising new techniques for teaching writing and reading which have emerged over the past few years."

The means by which higher-level literary skills are developed and measured are poorly understood by the American public, Judy believes. "When people talk about getting schools back to a state of excellence, what many of them really mean is little more than higher scores on standardized tests," he says. These shallow conceptions of education can stunt students' intellectual curiosity, Judy believes.

Further, the fill-in-the-blank approach of tests is echoed in classroom materials. "Too many children today think that language study is worksheets and multiple-choice questions based on facts found in a short paragraph. They develop limited expectations of what they can gain from print. They don't learn to search for meaning over larger units of text—meaning that is more than merely factual. In history, for instance, the concern for testing teaches a student to look for the dates of the start of the Civil War but not to conceptualize fully why the war began in the first place. In writing, it tends to create the student who may be a good speller, very concerned about grammatical correctness, but who can't organize and writes glib, superficial prose.

"A modest amount of assessment which is directly useful to teachers in improving instruction is an important part of the educational process,"

Judy says, "But educators must search for ways of assessing the schools that look directly at what students are doing, not just at how they're scoring and multiple-choice tests. It matters little whether children score well on vocabulary or grammar tests if they don't actually put pen to paper and write. Likewise in reading, grade-level scores are relatively meaningless in comparison to the fundamental question: 'How many books does the child read and of what sort?'"

"Instead of just looking at test scores and report cards," Judy comments, "Interested parents ought to ask about what their children are actually doing with language. Parents whose children read and write often can be confident their youngsters are receiving quality education, and that their test scores will be acceptable as well."

### **Research in Composition Newsletter**

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125 Aderhold Hall  
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